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FOXY FRED, THE KEENER.

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RUTH NEUMANN

BY MARCUS H. WARING—"Sergeant Mark."



FRED WAS MYSTIFIED. DID SHE KNOW THE STRICKEN MAN? OR DID SHE KNOW WHO HAD DONE THE DEED?

Foxy Fred, the Keener;

OR,

Bagging the Sandbagger Trio.

BY MARCUS H. WARING,

("SERGEANT MARK,")

AUTHOR OF "THE THREE SPOTTERS," "THE THREE SPOTTERS' DEAD MYSTERY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

STRUCK DOWN!

It had been a criminal deed. One could easily fancy that the blow had come from behind, as only cowards strike, but, in any case, there lay the man, senseless, as a mute witness to the act.

"He never tumbled over, hisself," commented the youth who had happened on the scene. "His pockets are turned inside out, an' that speaks for itself. He's been robbed; that's w'ot; robbed, after bein' smashed over the head with a sandbag or slung-shot. By crickey! but there's some mighty mean skunks in New York!"

Footsteps sounded, and a woman came quickly toward the spot.

"What is this?" she demanded.

"It's a man, mum," the youth replied, practically.

"Is he dead?"

"Only fer the time bein', mum. His pulse beats, an' there's a thumpin' goin' on under his vest, as ef a mason was drillin' a hole though his left side."

"Who is the poor wretch?"

"Dunno, by crickey!"

"But, why is he here? What does all this mean? Don't be so slow with your information, boy. Speak out!"

"Which same I should be delighted fer ter do ef I could, but I ain't got the means wherewith ter eloquidate. This gent is a stranger ter me, an' I found him jest afore you come up. Et seems clear that he fell among thieves an' got done up. Ef you war ter whisper sandbag, I guess you'd name the weapon; the motive, mebbe robbery. Or it may hav been a little revenge mixed in."

The woman said no more, and the last speaker continued to gaze at the fallen man, who was of about forty-five years, stout and broad of frame though not exactly corpulent. He was well-dressed, but the boy's experienced eye readily detected that his garments were not of New York manufacture.

The young observer was not as indifferent as his inactivity might seem to indicate. He had already decided that his personal care would do no good, and was now waiting for a policeman to appear.

Suddenly Foxy Fred became conscious that something was wrong with the woman, and he turned his gaze upon her. She was leaning against the wall, her face white and seemingly horror-stricken. Fred was mystified. Did she know the stricken man? or did she know who had done the deed?

"Be you sick, mum?" he asked.

"Sick? Yes; sick at heart!" she answered, in a strange voice.

"That's a queer sickness."

"Yes—and fatal."

She spoke so huskily, and her gaze gleamed so unnaturally in her pallid face that her companion began to grow suspicious.

"Do you know this gent?" he asked.

"I? No!"

"Then I reckon it affects yer fer ter see a feller-bein' spread out on his backbone, insenseless?"

"That is it," she agreed.

"Wal, mebbe they will bring him to, all right. Anyhow, I'm goin' ter stand by him an' see that no more harm don't come ter him. You see, I ain't a gent of business, an' I git time ter look inter things a bit."

"Who are you?"

"Foxy Fred, the Keener."

"What?"

"Frederick Walsingham Mather is my baptismal appendix, but the minister who tried ter say et all at one jump, took the lockjaw an' died of *del. trem.* Et's too long, the name is; an' I cut it down ter Foxy Fred. The 'Foxy' part means that I'm cunnin' an' wise—or think I be, which is all the same."

"Where do you live?"

"On Christopher street;" and Fred added the number.

"You may be wanted in this case."

"Who by?"

Before the woman could answer, footsteps were again heard and a man approached. He was a quaint-looking person. He was but a trifle over five feet in height, and had shoulders the breadth of which would have done credit to a six-footer. A broad, squat figure was his, and an unusually large head was made larger in appearance by a bushy white beard. He looked clean, but everything about him gave evidence of the fact that he cared but little for personal looks.

He came up rapidly.

"What's this?—what's this?" he demanded, in short, sharp utterances.

"It's a man that's been downed by piratical critters, ef signs are reliable," Fred explained. "He ain't ter blame fer laying down ter rest; most any one would do it ef banged over the cocoanut with a sandbag."

"Sandbag? Sandbag? Atrocious!" declared the short man. "Who did it?"

"Dunno!"

"Atrocious, atrocious!"

The new-comer had brought out a bottle, and was holding it to the fallen man's nostrils.

"Be you a doctor?" Foxy Fred asked, doubtfully.

"I am."

"Then you're jest the pill we want. This feller hadn't ought ter lay hyer all night."

"He is fast recovering, and this potent agent will hasten the work. Seet his muscles quiver; he moves! He will soon be— Ah!"

The victim of the assault opened his eyes.

"Be calm," urged the self-styled doctor. "The vital currents of life flow anew in your arteries, and complete recuperation advances apace. Dost feel the exhilarating compound doing its work?"

"Gammon!" exclaimed Fred; "that ain't the way ter talk ter a slung-shot man. Them big words would tangle a Congressman's idees. Hii mister, how be ye?"

He assumed a hearty manner and took his turn at questioning, but the unknown first rose to a sitting position and then looked at them stupidly.

"Got a bad lick, didn't ye?" Fred proceeded.

"New York; I want to go to New York," muttered the unknown, in a monotonous tone.

"You'd done better ter kept away from New York, I'm thinkin'. Who lambasted yer?"

"New York, New York," dully reiterated the victim.

"Feller-citizens, the feller is knocked out," Fred announced. "The blow scattered his wits, an' his thinker is all broke up. Guess he's got a fractur' o' the skull, or reconstruction o' the brain."

"He must be seen to, at once," declared the short man. "Give me a hand, boy, an' we'll take him to my office, which is in the next house."

"I reckon the perlece are the ones fer this job," began Fred, but the woman interrupted:

"The doctor is right. The police are very rough at the best, and should be avoided. Take him in, doctor, and I will pay all expenses."

"Pay? Pay?" echoed the doctor. "I'm not in need of money; rarely take it. Like to do a good job. Lift on him, boy; that's it. He's weak on the legs, but the suspended currents will soon be flowing. That's it; hold him tight. Here we are!"

Foxy Fred had yielded when the woman joined in with the doctor, and was now doing his best to help. His willingness to do this was increased by the fact that he saw a sign on the door which proclaimed that "J. McNabb" was a "Physician and Surgeon." Mr. McNabb did not fill one's ideal of a doctor, but it seemed he was all right, after all.

The victim of the assault was duly conducted to the so-called office, which showed little difference from an ordinary room, however. As the front door was closed a policeman came marching slowly down the street, but he was too late to take part in the affair.

Doctor McNabb produced a supply of drugs, and, also, examined the unknown's head.

"His skull is not fractured," was the final announcement. "Whether there is any concussion I am not able to say, but, plainly, he is badly hurt. There is no intelligence in his gaze, and no coherence in his mind."

"A sandbag plays hobbs with them things," Foxy Fred agreed. "Say, mister, take a brace, will yer? Let us know w'ot you run ag'in."

"On to New York!" muttered the victim.

"Jes' so, by mighty! New York is a boss place ef you don't run afoul o' thieves. Mister, w'ot's yer name?"

"New York; I want to go to New York."

The speaker regarded them fixedly, but his gaze was a stupid gaze, and no intelligence was back of it.

"We might as well address the Sphinx," declared McNabb, with a sigh.

"I dunno who them be, but this feller ain't up ter snuff, so ter speak. W'ot's his chances?"

"No one can say. He may be all right in the morning; or he may have brain fever; or he may be a permanent idiot."

"By crickey! that ain't encouragin'. An ijgit never could even tell his name, ef he was more ijjiotic than some folks s'posed ter be sensible. Sech bein' the case et's our duty ter investigate an' see ef we kin learn his name an' other pertic'lers. I'll appoint F. W. Mather a committee of investigation."

And forthwith Fred began to search the unknown's pockets. He was not immediately successful. The coat yielded nothing, and it was not until the inside pocket of the vest was reached that any discoveries followed. From there, however, he brought out two papers. One was an envelope bearing the New York post-mark of a month before, and addressed to "C. E. Jordan, Poland, Ohio."

"Here we hav his nibsey's handle," quothe Fred. "Now fer the next one."

The "next one" was a half-sheet of note paper, and contained a part of a letter. Whoever had torn it from the rest of the sheet had left address and signature behind; it began and ended abruptly.

The first lines were as follows:

"—what this meant to me I can never make plain. Through long years of toil and wandering I had always hoped that, some time, I would see happier days, but years came and went and brought no relief. Finally, the letter came from New York. How that changed everything! How it set my blood to leaping! How happy I was!"

"I pause at this point to wonder— and a sickening dread goes with the feeling as I inquire, Is th's letter sincere? Has the man in New York promised in good faith? Plainly, his is no idle pledge. I am so little known that no one ever would g'et my name, my story and my address, and write thus. The letter means something."

"Either it is the kind act of a friend, as it claims to be, or 'tis the snare of an enemy. Which?"

"I fear you are growing tired of this long letter, but I felt that I must tell you all my hopes. You used to wonder at my fitful moods in the past. You will now understand why I was moody. To-morrow I start for New York, and I go with an eagerness which no words can describe. Pray for me, old friend; pray that I may succeed in my great undertaking."

"In a few hours I leave here, and I go with this for my watchword: *On to New York!*"

As Foxy Fred read the last words aloud the victim of the assault suddenly raised his drooping head, a look of faint intelligence appeared in his face, and he exclaimed:

"On to New York!"

"Poor feller!" commented Fred. "His body is in New York, but his mind is—where?"

He read the remainder of the letter, but it was not important. It referred to mill-property which, it seemed, the writer and his friend owned in common, but no name of person or place occurred therein.

"A perfect Sahara," observed McNabb.

"I don't know her," Fred answered, "but I do wish this dockymen told more. Where's the rest o' the letter? The envelope don't belong to et; 'tain't the same writin'. We kin set et down thet the envelope was to this man, an' this beheaded letter from him. He's come ter our city on a great work an' fell among thieves. We must help him. But how kin we do it?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST CLEW.

DOCTOR MCNABB readily replied:

"Write to Poland, Ohio. That will bring his friends on here, or we will get directions as to what we shall do."

"That won't ketch the sandbaggers, an' I guess I'll waltz over ter the perlece-station an' put them on the track, right off."

"It is not likely they will do anything. By that I mean they're not likely to find the sandbaggers. They did their work and disappeared, and, in order to get trace of them, we must learn why this Mr. Jordan, if that's his name, came to New York, and whom he came to meet."

"That is right, that's the only proper way."

All this while the woman companion of the men had been standing in silence. She saw and heard all; in fact, she seemed to be singularly interested; but she had seen fit to be silent until she abruptly spoke the last words recorded.

"Dunno about that," returned Foxy Fred, dubiously. "The perleece wouldn't favor so much delay, anyhow."

"It will make their work the easier, by putting the guilty persons off their guards."

"True, very true."

"Ladies an' gents, I don't see et that way, but the majority rules. You kin do as you say, but I hope no harm won't come of it. Them's my views."

Fred still spoke doubtfully, and there seemed good reason why he should look upon the plan with disfavor. He knew, if the others did not, that, when a crime was committed, the police ought to have immediate notice of the fact, and if he had not been so much younger than his associates, he would not have given in so readily.

"We must get this man to bed," remarked Doctor McNabb. "I want to give him a sleeping potion, and let him get rest. Poor fellow! he needs all the rest possible, to build him up again. Atrocious! atrocious!"

As he spoke he began fumbling at Jordan's coat, to remove it, when an object dropped therefrom to the floor.

All looked, and they saw something which Fred hastened to pick up.

"A 'charm' off of a watch-chain!" he announced. "Crickey! but Mister Man has a funny place fer carryin' it. Yes, an' I don't see ez he ever had a watch."

The last comment was made after he had looked in vain for evidence at Jordan's pockets and button-holes; no sign of wear was to be found there.

"The charm is not his," said McNabb.

"Sartain not; but it does belong ter one o' the sluggers. Here's two broken links o' the chain hangin' or, an' the last one has a bit o' wool in its broken claw. The thing ketched on ter Jordan, an' it's been a-hangin' there, ever sense. Yes; it come from the sandbaggers, an' we now hev a slight clew ter them who did the job, b' mighty!"

He went to the light.

"By crickey!" he added, "ef we kin strike one end o' the string we ought ter run it through, with this!"

"Why?" asked McNabb.

"This charm is a corker; don't b'lieve there's many like it in town. There's a kind o' picture set in a frame o' plain gold, an' it shows a race-track. There's the crowd at one side, dimly visible, an' a hoss goin' like mad with a jockey on his back; an' the hoss's eye is a diamond stone, b'jinks!"

Fred heard a sound as if some one had drawn a deep, quivering breath, and looked around to see who it was, but nobody claimed to be the sigher. His gaze dwelt suspiciously on the lady, who looked pale and wretched, and stood with nervously-clasped hands, but she said nothing, and the doctor commented:

"Odd, odd, by Jove!"

"It's a primer of no small value, Doc. The feller who wore this bad sportin' blood in him, the picture shows that. He was well heeled, financially, too, the diamonds tells that!"

"True."

"Wal, that's the primer by which I'm goin' ter hunt him down."

"You?"

The word came suddenly, sharply from the lady's lips. Those lips remained unclosed as she regarded Fred eagerly.

"Me, mum!"

"Will you find him?—will you search for him?"

"Sure! Et seems ter interest ye, mum."

Fred made the remark inquisitively, and she appeared suddenly to realize that she was betraying feelings not in harmony with the state of affairs. Her manner became calm and business-like.

"Of course I am interested, as every honest person should be. Mr. Jordan, if that is his name, came to New York on some errand we may consider peaceable and worthy, lacking proof to the contrary; but he has been brutally used. His wrongs should be righted."

"Fact, by crickey!"

"If you will hunt down the assailants, I will give you a hundred dollars."

Frederick W. Mather gazed at the speaker in bewilderment. This was more money than he ever had handled, and the idea of possessing it dazzled him.

"Honest Injun!" he finally inquired.

"I mean it, certainly."

"Say, w'ot's your name an' address?"

"I am Mrs. Maria Redburn, of No. — Clinton place."

"I'll book it!"

He was about to write it down in a note-book, but Mrs. Redburn promptly stopped him.

"Don't do it! If you investigate among dangerous men you want nothing about you which will in any way betray your identity, plans or friends. Surely, you can remember my name and address?"

"I kin, with a hundred 'cases' back of it!" Fred grimly declared.

"Go on, then, and rely upon me to keep my word. I think I will make a slight stay in the city, though I had intended to go away, and see the result. I really feel an interest in this matter."

This was said with the air of one who forces a certain feeling, but Fred was not wholly prepared to admit that she was assuming interest. Either she had been deeply disturbed by causes not perceptible on the surface, or she was an unusually emotional woman.

There was not much more to do in the house. Jordan was put to bed and given some drug by McNabb. The latter really showed skill as a nurse, and Fred began to believe he might be a good doctor, if he did not look it.

Every one but the boy seemed to have forgotten the watch-charm, and he hung to it closely.

He and Mrs. Redburn left the house.

"You shall hear from me ag'in, mum," the youth promised. "I'm Foxy Fred, the Keener—so called because I never get left, an' I'm bound ter win that hundred. You'll find me a Keener, sure!"

Expressing no opinion on this subject, she said a few more words and started away, but, as she saw two men advancing, asked Fred to walk with her to the more traveled street, and this he did.

The two men appeared to take no notice of them, and at the corner they separated, and the Keener retraced his steps.

When he did so he saw that the two men were bent over, and, it seemed, searching for something on the pavement.

"Crickey!" he exclaimed, "that's the very spot where Jordan was downed!"

This fact impressed him so strongly that he was about to dodge into a doorway, to watch unobserved, when he noticed that he was already seen; so he put on a bold and innocent face and kept on his way.

Reaching the men, he accosted them carelessly:

"Hev ye dropped a thousand-dollar green-back, gents? If so, I'll find et fer half."

"Do you live near here, boy?" one of them asked.

"Wal, I don't live nowhar else."

"Have you seen anybody pick anything up here?"

"Can't remember no sech case."

"Git down on yer marrers an' look, an' I'll pay ye for it."

"Look fer w'ot?"

"What's that ter you?"

"It's a good deal, by crickey! How kin I find w'ot is wanted, ef I don't know w'ot 'tis?"

"That's a fact. Wal, it's an ornament the size of your thumb-nail, with a gold frame an' a dark picture in it."

"Likeness of your best gal?"

"Don't be funny! Flop down on yer shanks an' look."

"I'm with yer, boss."

Down Fred got, and he began to look as critically as if he was not sure the "ornament" was even then in his own pocket. But he was bound to keep in the swim, and solve the question: Who were these men, and what did they know about the charm?

CHAPTER III.

THE HEAD VILLAIN.

"MIGHTY queer where that thing has gone!" declared one of the men.

"We'll find it, yet," the comrade replied.

"Ain't we looked everywhere?"

"Pshaw! you're too easy discouraged, Eph. As fer me, I'll turn up the pavin'-stones afore I give up."

"That's all right, but the thing ain't under them. I reckon the same parties took it away who took—"

"Cheese it! Very likely he walked away himself. As fer what we're after, it may hev struck a stone an' bounded a rod away. Don't make any talk before this kid. He looks sharp."

Nearly all of this conversation had been in a low voice, but the hearing of the "kid" was sufficiently acute to take it all in. He did this very innocently, moving around on his knees and peering into niches between the paving-stones.

Foxy Fred, however, was sure he was right in the company of men who had aided to sandbag Jordan. Of this fact they had themselves furnished proof, and no more was needed. Dangerous companions they were, too; men who would commit an assault like that which had gone before would do anything to subdue a person caught spying upon them—to silence him forever.

Despite this the "Keener" never wavered in his purpose. He knew he was on the threshold of the solution of the mystery. The question was, could he arrive at the solution when danger marked every step of the way?

The search was kept up until the policeman came around on his beat, when the men ceased operations and one of them made a pretense of easing a shoe-pinched foot. The patrolman was in good humor and did not order them to move on, so they were able to resume operations as soon as he was out of sight.

As they still looked in vain, "Eph" grew angry.

"Darn the luck!" he exclaimed. "I tell you, Chub, the confounded thing ain't here!"

Chub sat still and looked solemn.

"You may be right," he admitted.

"Wal, then w'ot's the use o' tumblin' 'round here on our shanks?"

"The boss would be mad ef we went back without it."

"Darn! w'ot should he keer about a little trinket like that?"

"Eph, you're a slow-witted cuss! Didn't he tell us, plain, that he didn't keer fer the value o' the thing, but didn't want ter leave it layin' around?"

"He's too blamed afraid o' the cops!"

"Hush!"

Mr. Chub seemed to labor under the belief that his own voice was much lower than Eph's, but though both had tried to talk in a key which would make their remarks inaudible to their assistant, the Keener had overheard everything. He saw, too, that they were only the tools of a certain head villain, and he became ambitious to learn who that person was. No doubt Chub and Eph had taken part in the assault on the sandbagged man, but the brains of the plot were still invisible.

Fred wanted to see the man who carried them.

"We may as well give this up," Chub finally remarked, in a louder voice. "It don't matter much, fer I don't s'pose it was worth over a dollar, anyhow. Boy, how much do you want fer your trouble?"

"Oh! I ain't hard ter deal with," the Keener replied, glibly. "I ruther like ter travel on my kneecaps, anyhow; et's amocsin'. You might give me a quarter, ef agreeable."

"Here it is. Now, toddle along."

"I toddle."

All three were by that time on their feet. Fred gave no evidence that he regarded the matter as more than an every-day affair, and spoke nonchalantly. He now added, "Good-night, gents!" and walked away with his hands in his pockets.

Innocent enough he seemed, but he had no intention of letting the matter drop there. He was in possession of a clew, and if he let the chance slide, he might never recover it. He intended to follow the men. In thus deciding he was not ignorant of the fact that he would run great risk. Chub and Eph were "toughs" of the lowest order of intellect and highest order of viciousness—typical sandbaggers. Once let them suspect him and his chances would be as precarious as Jordan's had been in their hands.

Despite this he intended to follow them, and when he reached the corner of the block he first took a sly glance over his shoulder, and then, seeing them just moving on, started into a run and dashed around the block like a Guttenburg winner.

This was done to cut them off, and he was successful. He reached the corner at the west end just as they turned down the next street. Here he made an effort to disguise himself somewhat by turning up his collar and jamming his hat well down on his head, and then he fell behind them and followed on.

Chub and Eph walked with a business-like air, but the pursuit was not long. Four blocks away a man was waiting on a corner, and they paused and entered into conversation with him.

The Keener would have given a good deal to hear that conversation, but he did the next best thing. Lurking in a dark doorway he looked closely at the third man.

He was not off the same piece with Chub and Eph. They were roughly dressed and shaggy of hair and beard, while he was faultlessly attired—from his own point of view. He had expen-

sive clothes, patent-leather shoes, a tall hat and a flowing red necktie, the latter being inlaid with a red rose in the adjacent button-hole.

"A man about town!" Fred muttered. "Looks as if he might be stuck on cards an' the race-course. Jest the kind of a duck ter buy a watch-charm like one I know of. F. W. Mather, I'll bet a fresh lobster you're on the track, already.

But who is his Nibsey?"

The man thus flippantly referred to seemed to listen to the report of his friends with dissatisfaction, but he did not prolong the interview. He handed over a sum of money to Chub and Eph, and then left them.

This pleased the Keener. He wanted to follow the sport, and this would not be safe with Chub and Eph around. They went one way, and Fred fell in behind their master as the latter went the other.

No great task was before the pursuer. The supposed sport went only a few blocks, and then paused in front of a modest-looking house, opened the door with a key and went in. Fred found himself on the wrong side, with no one at hand of whom he could inquire who the stranger was.

The Keener lingered around the place for half an hour, and then decided that he was not likely to make more discoveries. The hour was late, and the gentleman with the red necktie probably had gone to bed like a good citizen.

He was about to move away when a woman came along the street. She was one who seemed to have seen the rough side of life. Her apparel had that ill-fitting, slovenly habit of one who, from some cause or other, is low down in the world, and without ambition to rise.

Fred judged from her form and carriage that she was not yet old, but a thick veil so covered her face that he could not tell positively whether she was sixteen or sixty. Not being aware that he had any business with this run-down specimen he would have allowed her to pass without giving her a serious thought, but she first hesitated and then came to a stop.

"Do you live near here, boy?" she asked, in a low, thick voice.

"Sure!" Fred replied.

"Then you know the folks?"

"Some of them."

"Do you know a man who lives in there?" and she pointed at the very house where the sport had gone.

"What name, mum?"

"Percy Berthrong."

"Describe him!"

"He is about thirty years old, and tall and well formed; always dresses well, being somewhat fond of display. Often he wears a red necktie!"

The last words were added after a pause. It completed a description which, though not positive, applied so well to the man he had followed that the Keener did not doubt that it was the same one.

"Reckon I know him slightly," he agreed.

"Friend o' yours?"

"Who knows?"

"Wal, you ought ter."

"There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our simple philosophy."

"That sounds stately an' good, like music from a big church organ, but it don't enlighten me much. Wot's your name, mum?"

"It don't matter; names are but idle breath. Yet, call me Meg Mason."

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE ENCOUNTER.

FOXY FRED was already interested in the young woman, for he believed she was one who could tell him much about Percy Berthrong, if she would. He even went so far with his theorizing as to imagine that she was one who had once been a favorite with Percy, and had been cast off.

"Meg Mason," he repeated. "That name is short an' sweet. It ain't so fancy as hisn, though."

"It fits me."

"What about Percy?"

The Keener wished his companion to tell something, but she saw fit to take his inquiry in a different way.

"Ye, what about him?" Meg returned. "Have you seen him to night?"

"Jest went in."

"Where had he been."

"Don't know."

"Why did you follow him?"

"Foller him? Who said I did anything of the kind?"

"I inferred as much."

"Wal, don't you jump at a conclusion like a speckled trout after a fly, mum? Jest 'cause I

set here on the door-step an' see Perce go in, it ain't no sign I know where he's been. I don't. Guess, though, he'd been out fer a waltz, fer exercise. Say, wot is his business callin', anyhow?"

"I don't know; I wish I did. I know too little about him."

"He ain't used ye well. Eh?"

"I have nothing to say, and I am going, now."

Meg gathered her ill-fitting garments closer around her and turned away.

"Say, wait!" the Keener urged. "I want ter talk with you, fer I reckon we may be mutually useful ter each other. Give a feller a show! I'm frank enough ter say that I want ter git primers on Perce, an' I think you're the hairpin ter help me."

"I know nothing!"

Speaking curtly she turned and walked away, and Fred found himself utterly left out in the cold. He was reluctant to lose any chance to get more light on the subject, for the hundred dollars' reward did not grow any smaller in imagination as he progressed. Probably Meg Mason knew nothing about the case in which C. E. Jordan had figured, but she did know more about Berthrong than the boy did. Obeying an impulse, he walked hurriedly to her side.

"Say, mum, ef you don't want ter say how you knew Perce, won't you tell me jest the kind of a hairpin he is, as a man?"

She stopped short and looked at him steadily.

"If I tell you this, will you promise not to follow me?"

"Yes."

"And will you stand right here and let me go away?—stand here until I pass yonder corner?"

"I will, that."

"Then I'll tell you the kind of a man Percy Berthrong seems to be to one who knows him well."

Pausing for a moment as if her strength was not equal to the case, unless reinforced, she added:

"As I know him, he is a villain. He has plenty of money. How he gets it I don't say. He may have a fortune back of him, but I believe he makes all as he goes along—*how*, I don't say. He is polite and pleasant when he wishes, but that's all the worse for his victims. He is cunning, too; so cunning that those who would work against him must beware or their work will bring them ruin or death!"

Hardly had the last word passed her lips before she wheeled and hastened away.

The Keener remained azzing after her blankly. It was hard to remain idle and lose such a good chance to learn more of her, but his promise was made and he would not break it.

"She don't recommend Perce over-high," Fred soliloquized. "Reg'lar crook, he must be, ef I take her word. Cunnin', too; is he? Wal, that don't surprise me so much, fer a sport about town does git ter be about as sharp as they make 'em. Cunnin' or not, I intend ter try my luck on him."

As there did not seem to be much more to do, that night, the Keener started for home, where he arrived in good condition. He slept until well into the morning, rose and had breakfast, and then left the house.

"Guess I'll go around ter Doc McNabb's an' see Jordan," he decided. "Ef he's got his patient back inter his wits et will save me some trouble in my business."

The Keener, however, had gone but half-way to McNabb's when he encountered some one who accosted him.

"Say, do you live near here?"

It was a question which Fred had heard before in the last twenty-four hours, and it had grown somewhat monotonous. He stopped and looked severely at the speaker. He saw a boy of delicate frame and good clothes—two facts which did not appeal to the Keener's good-bumor. He possessed neither, and had no small measure of contempt for those thus equipped.

"Sir," he replied, with ponderous dignity, "I do live nigh here. Wot of it?"

"Did you see the man assaulted, last night?"

Fred's haughty air died away.

"Wot do you know about any sech circumstance?" he demanded, more pleasantly.

"I heard them talking about it."

"Who?"

"The sport and the other man."

"Do you know that gang, sonny?"

"I hope I don't know them. No; I only know of them: Percy Berthrong, and the rest."

"Wot talk did you bear?"

"He lost a watch-charm over near here, and I

thought I might find it if I came over. I was going to give it to a policeman."

"Oh! you were, eh? Why?"

"Because I don't like the gang. Understand me, I'm not acquainted with them, but I know of their work. I don't mean that it's a regular 'gang,' as city gangs go. I don't think Percy Berthrong has any regular confederate, but when he needs help, he gets men like Chub and Eph to help him out. I used to live right where I could see all these things, though I've moved away, now, and I suppose there are but few persons who know so much of Berthrong's affairs as I do."

"Say, wot's your name?"

"Chester Lynn."

"Be you a feller that rolls in gold an' fine linen, or be you one who has time fer fun?"

"What do you mean?"

"That ef you are willin', an' kin satisfy me you are all right, I might take you as a pal in a fight ag'inst Perce—if you know as much as you say."

"Do that, and I'll work manfully!" cried Chester, with zeal.

"Manfully! Hum?"

Frederick Walsingham Mather looked doubtfully at the delicate figure before him. Its owner did not look as if he could stand the hard knocks of a campaign against Berthrong, though, the Keener mentally observed, "he probably would be considered a big feller up Murray Hill way." Still, Chester had a bright face, and an air which told of self-reliance, and this fact made due impression.

"Be you used ter knockin' around an' roughin' it?"

"I've seen my share," young Lynn coolly replied.

"Wal, I guess we kin strike up a bargain, so I'll meet you here half an hour later an' see wot we kin do. Jest hang around here until I get back, will yer?"

"Yes," Chester agreed, cheerfully.

"All right; I'm off on a bit o' business, but I'll soon be back. Don't leave until I come."

The Keener hastened away, but, as he went, his faith in young Lynn began to waver. The smaller boy impressed him as being one who was to be trusted, but would be be any use against Berthrong? Fred began to fear he had over-estimated the importance of what he claimed to know.

"I'm in fer it, though," was the decision, "an' I'll jest see wot Ches is good fer."

It was not a long walk to Doctor McNabb's, and he was soon in the presence of that gentleman.

"How is C. E. Jordan?" the Keener demanded.

"A sick man, a sick man," McNabb answered.

"It looks now as if brain fever would come. His temperature is far above the normal, and all things point to such an illness."

"Ain't he got his senses back?"

"No. He is now in a condition practically one of unconsciousness."

Fred shook his head. It seemed he was not to have Jordan's help in the campaign ahead of him, and must go on blindly. It was annoying, but he did not waver in his purpose. He was bound to avenge the assault and clear up the mystery, for he felt sure there was a strange and tragic story back of it all, with Percy Berthrong as the villain of the drama.

CHAPTER V.

THE KEENER TRACKS HIS PREY.

WHEN the Keener returned to the place of meeting he found Chester Lynn waiting for him, and he proceeded to question that youth further. The result was not satisfactory, for Chester did not seem so well informed as Fred had hoped, but he did know more of Percy Berthrong than the questioner did, so the latter was not disposed to break off the alliance.

Starting on, finally, they were nearing the sport's residence when that gentleman, himself, suddenly appeared to view. He was walking jauntily along the street, swinging a fancy cane, and seemed to be in great good humor with himself.

"Fall in!" directed the Keener. "Keep on his track, but appear as innocent as a shy young gazelle. Don't let him see yer lookin' at him."

There really was no danger of discovery, for Berthrong did not once look around, but they used due caution and did themselves credit as secret followers.

Berthrong went straight to Broadway and took a surface car bound north, and the boys jumped

upon the car next behind it and continued the pursuit. When the sport alighted he at once entered a store.

"Tailor's shop!" quoth the Keener, in disgust. "That don't look promisin'. I don't know of nothing less interestin' ter us than how Perce's pants set."

"Still we ought to keep watch," Chester advised. "Suppose you stand by the door and make believe you are interested in the show in the window, and I'll stand in the doorway across the street and watch from there. Then we will have him cornered, as it were."

Fred thought this a good plan, and it was duly adopted. The Keener took position as indicated, but his patience was thoroughly tried before he saw Berthrong again. Finally, that person and the tailor came to the door.

"Allow me, sir," spoke the man of the shears, deferentially, "to wish you joy on the momentous occasion."

"Thank you," Percy answered, twirling his mustache airily.

"I am a humble man," added the tailor, "but I suppose I have fitted out more gentlemen to enter upon wedded bliss than any other person of my calling in New York, and this I will say, my garments fit perfectly. No bagging at the knees, no over-fullness at the shoulders, and the skirts hang like a poem."

"You are an artist, certainly."

"Thank you, Mr. Berthrong. And now, I trust you and the lady of your choice will be happy."

"I shall, at least, if you get the clothes around on time. Remember, the event takes place at nine, and I want 'em at six."

"I'll not forget. It gives me eight hours, and you shall have them as promised. One doesn't get married every day, sir."

"Only in Chicago. Good-day, sir."

Berthrong readjusted his shining hat and sauntered down the street with a satisfied air. The tailor watched him meditatively and murmured:

"He makes a swell appearance when I make his clothes, but he's very cheap stock, himself. And just to think of his having got old Forryster's daughter! I wonder if the old man will let this flashy fellow squander his dollars?"

Berthrong went out of sight, and the tailor retreated to his lair. Foxy Fred crossed the street and rejoined his young associate.

"Ches," he said, quickly, "I'm onter his Nibs. Come along after him, an' I'll tell ye as we go. Perce had good reason ter visit the tailor, fer he is goin' ter git married."

"Is he?"

"Is he? You take it cool, but don't yer see it's an important event? As long as we're interested in Perce, we must be interested in his gettin' married. Seems he's got a rich gal on the string; daughter of a certain Mr. Forryster, whoever he is. The old gent has rocks, an' I guess Perce knows it. Say, he's playin' in big luck fer a man about town!"

"That's so."

"You never heerd of Forryster, did ye?"

"Not as a friend of Percy's, but I believe there is a man of that name on Lexington avenue; a rich fellow who moves in high society."

"That's the one, no doubt. Say, we might possibly cut quite a figger ef we went ter ther Forrysters an' told them w'ot Perce is."

"And have them set us down as liar? No; you and I wouldn't have any influence with them, and the best thing we can do is to keep away."

"You may be right, an' we'll let it rest fer now. Time enough ter decide before nine o'clock. In the mean while, we'll hev two or three eyes on Perce, and see w'ot is at work in his brain-dish."

It was not hard to follow Berthrong, but the result was not to their liking. He went home, and though they waited for some time, did not reappear. After the lapse of half an hour, Chester went to a neighboring jeweler's store to see what the time was.

"I've got to leave you for now," he then announced, "but I'll meet you at noon, wherever you say, and go in on any plan we may agree upon. I won't be rash with promises, for you haven't told me yet why you are interested in Percy."

"That's all right, Ches; mebbe I'll tell you, later on. Anyhow, you seem ter be a good feller, an' I don't want ter lose sight o' you. Be sure ter meet me."

The place was duly agreed upon, and then Chester went away. The Keener had no time to meditate upon his ally, for all his attention became absorbed when he saw "Chub" appear not far away. That person entered the house

where Berthrong made his home, and was invisible for half an hour.

"W'ot's goin' on?" Foxy Fred wondered. "The gang don't seem ter got their business done yet. Wonder ef it wouldn't pay me ter jog along after Chub when he comes out!"

He was so impressed with the idea that he decided to act upon it, and, when the sandbagger finally made his reappearance and started to retrace his steps, Fred fell in behind him and moved quietly along in pursuit. He expected the fellow to go home, but when his long and rapid steps finally ceased he was, instead, in Washington Square.

Chub paused and looked around him as if in search of some one, nor was he long kept waiting. A tall, slender woman advanced to meet him hastily. There was something familiar about her, Fred thought, and he recalled Meg Mason at once, but dismissed the idea presently.

The dress was remarkably like hers, but this woman had a more bony form. Her face, too, was unvailed. It was a drawn, careworn face, and she looked like one who had touched elbows with the roughest of New York's people, but, nevertheless, it was not a hard face.

Her air was one of eagerness as she drew near Chub, but he thrust his hands into his pockets and contemplated her sullenly.

She began, almost breathlessly:

"I have come—"

"Yes; I see you've come. So does small pox and cholera."

"Morris, I mean no harm—"

"Oh! come off! I don't give me any more o' yer cheap talk. I've met yer as I agreed to. W'ot now? Hev I got ter hear a lecture?"

"Do I ever lecture you?"

"Do you ever do anything else?"

"Surely, I don't interfere with your private affairs, Morris. All I ask is that you won't cast me off," was the pathetic answer.

"You women are cokers!" growled Chub. "You think ef a feller pays any attention to ye, once, he must always be tied ter your apron-strings. Now, I ain't that sort, an' you don't want ter try any funny biz on me. D'y'e hear w'ot I say?"

The ruffian glared at her and looked as if he intended to assault her then and there. He was very brave when facing the slender woman, and the brute in his nature showed plainly.

"I never betrayed your confidence or your plans; nobody could be truer than I've been," he humbly replied.

"Don't shout it all over the Square, or somebody may want ter know w'ot plans I had fer you ter give away. Meg Mason, you make me tired!"

"Oh! Morris!"

It was a weak reply, but she was not a strong woman, physically or mentally. With the singular perversity of her sex, she had given her affection to a man far beneath her in intelligence, and she clung to him when her judgment must have told her better.

Chub glared at her as if her last words had been a deadly insult to him, but he was silent for some time.

Gazing at the ground he meditated, and finally announced his decision.

"I reckon you kin go over ter my sister's. A feller might as wal try ter shake off a burr as you. Come on, an' don't be yawpin' my affairs in the street. Jest now, I don't want my secrets spread out. See?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAND OF AN ENEMY.

CHUB caught Meg roughly by the arm and pulled her along with him, but she was glad to go even in such an unceremonious way. They left the Square.

Foxy Fred had managed to overhear all of this without attracting attention, and it was of interest. The woman was named Meg Mason. It was the same name given by the vailed woman he had met near Percy Berthrong's house; but the two persons were not one; that was certain. Yet, one had claimed to know about the affairs of "the gang," and the other certainly did have such knowledge.

The Keener was puzzled, but he had a suspicion that the vailed woman had not been what she seemed. She had concealed her face, and he did not doubt that she had given a false name.

Who and what was she?

As he could not solve this question he set out to follow the second Meg and Chub. It proved to be an easy task, for they entered a house on Macdougal street. The place was something more than a private residence, for a beer-saloon was in the basement, and the room next above

had all its windows thrown open as if it was a public resort.

The Keener was in the right mood for reckless work, and he only paused to give his predecessors a little time, and then walked in after them.

They were not in sight, but the room mentioned was open. It was not occupied, just then, but around the long table were chairs, and on it, newspapers. Some one was in the habit of making it a resort, and Fred suspected that it was well occupied of evenings. There was more security there than in a private house, but this did not suit him; he had come there for information, and was eager to learn more.

The murmur of voices came from the next room.

"I'll bet a hat that Chub's brought up in there," was the Keener's comment.

His zeal to press matters at once led him to fresh risks, and he retraced his steps to the hall and looked for the door of the other room. It was in an alcove where he thought there was a chance of escaping detection, and, seeing a transom above it, he mounted a chair to get a view of the interior.

As he had expected, Chub and Meg were there. The former had grown more amiable.

"Now, ef you want ter git back inter my good graces, the way is open," he was saying, "an' the condition ain't hard."

"Tell me what it is!" she exclaimed, quickly.

"It concerns Maze."

Meg's face clouded.

"What of her?"

"The boss wants her."

"Hasn't he got her?"

"He has, an' he ain't. She's darned suspicious of him, an', mebbe, right on the point of turnin' ag'in' him. You know how it's been with her; she'll git on her high hoss, an' then the devil, himself, can't manage her."

"She has always been very good to me."

"That's jest it!" Chub declared, viciously. "She has fairly bewitched you. You didn't used ter be that way until she come nosin' around, but she drilled inter yer the doctrine that because a woman gets stuck on a feller he hadn't orter hev no other woman look at him."

"I never objected to that, but I was your wife, and—"

"Fling that in my face ag'in, will yer? Be I ter blame? Ain't I told you often ter go your way an' let me go mine? But let that drop. Help us in this case, an' I'll still stan' by ye."

"She's a fool ef she believes that," thought Foxy Fred, at the transom.

Weak as Meg was, she did doubt, now, and her face showed it. But Chub went on freely:

"Maze has gone back on the boss. Fact is, Meg, Maze has skipped out. Perce don't know where she is."

"Well?"

"You are the one ter find her. You know more of her habits than any one else, an' where she goes; an' you are one she trusts. Ef you'll find her, Perce will pay you hard cash an' I'll use ye white."

"For betraying her!"

"Who said anything about betrayin' her?"

"If Percy Berthrong wants her back it is not for any good reason."

"Bab! how you talk; it's nonsense! I b'lieve he thinks o' goin' ter California, an' wants her along. But let that drop; we needn't concern ourselves about other folks's business. We will stick right to our own affairs, Meg, old gal. Now, ever sence Maze got her cranky fit on she has been mum ter the boss, but you hev kept in with her, or, ruther, she's kept in with you. Nobody else knows her habits as you do, an' you kin guess where ter find her. Will you do it?"

"Did Berthrong ask you to get this favor from me?"

"No; it's all on my own hook."

For once Chub told the truth. It was a sudden thought with him that if he could get the desired information from Meg he would be able to get more money out of Berthrong. He had assumed an amiable manner now, to influence Meg, and the device was not without effect.

"It wouldn't be right," she remonstrated, faintly.

"Why not?"

"He has cast Maze off, and if she's in hiding, it's because she's afraid of him."

"Pshaw!"

"Percy Berthrong is a dangerous man."

"Oh! come, now! The boss don't like ter be bullied by nobody, but he's a good feller; he is. Anyhow that needn't concern us. D'y'e know whar Maze is?"

"No."

"But you kin find her?"

"I might, perhaps."
"Will yer?"

Meg was silent. She began to tremble. She did not want to betray a sister woman, but her dog-like devotion to that brute beside her knew no bounds. Her common sense told her that his present amiable mood would last only until his end was accomplished, but, like many another person before her, she was deaf to reason. She hoped against hope—hoped that he would improve on his past record.

"Come, old gal, be good!" Chub urged.

"I might do it," she slowly replied.

"Go ahead, an' I'll do what's right."

The promise did not put Meg in a cheerful mood, for she felt that it would be a most cruel and evil act to betray the other woman. Chub saw how she felt, and he began to clinch his hold upon her. She was taken at a disadvantage, for, brute that he was, she rested all her affection in him. In a few minutes she had fully agreed to find Maze.

"Oh! you beauties!" muttered Foxy Fred, at the transom; "you two would make a pig blush. I kin see that a weak person may be more dangerous than a wicked one. Meg, you ought ter take a reef an' drop that bulldog lover o' yours. He will wind up by killin' you, ef you don't—an' you can't, or won't, see it!"

His disgust was great, but it increased immediately after. Without any warning he suddenly found his ankle clasped by something, and he looked down and saw a man gazing up at him.

"Spy!" quoth that person, tersely.

The Keener did some rapid thinking. Many things were capable of two interpretations, but to argue that he was not a spy would be a waste of breath. Caught in the act there was only one thing to do, and he did it to the best of his ability. A kick released his ankle and he made a headlong leap to pass the man; but the latter caught at him and both fell to the floor with a crash.

Fred was uninjured, and he promptly endeavored to worm out of the grasp upon him, but his enemy held fast and shouted for help.

This demonstration could have but one result; Chub came rushing out of the room beyond.

"Grapple on ter him!" called the man on the floor. "He's a spy!"

Chub seized the Keener, yanked him to his feet, banged him against the wall, and exclaimed:

"A spy? Who's he been spyin' on?"

"You!"

"Me? He's been spyin' on ME! Say, I'll strangle the little viper, right here!"

He moved his big hand toward Fred's throat, but the latter spoke with surprising calmness:

"Now, you hold on, admiral! I object ter bein' hugged, an' you may ez well take somebody o' yer size. I ain't done nothin' out o' the way. This fellow is down on me—got an old grudge, you see—an' he's doin' this out o' spite. See?"

"Oh! you liar!" shouted the fallen man, "I've a good mind ter smash you fer that. Didn't I ketch you spyin' on Chub over the transom?"

"It was me ketched you!" the Keener unblushingly returned.

The accuser was dumfounded by the charge, but it was Chub, himself, who destroyed Fred's last hope. He exclaimed:

"Say, I've seen you before, boy!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

As Chub spoke these words his ugly face became more ugly, and he glared at Foxy Fred as if he intended to demolish him, then and there.

"You're the kid that hunted in the street fer us!" he added, suspiciously,

The Keener made a pretense of being surprised.

"Hello, boss!" he returned; "is it really you? I wouldn't know ye ef I hadn't seen you, b'gosh! So we meet ag'in? Hope I see you well!"

"You see me too well fer your own good!" Chub growled. "It occurred ter me after we left you, last night, that you might not be the innocent duck you pretended ter be, an' now I know it. So you've been houndin' us! Wal, much good may it do ye, now you've got here!"

"Now you hold on, admiral; you're all off your horizontal. I ain't as bad as you take me fer!"

Chub turned abruptly to the second man.

"Was this kid spyin' on me?"

"Yes; he had got up in a chair, an' was lookin' over the transom an' hearkin' ter all you said."

"That settles him. His little day is past, an'

he won't get a chance ter blow on me. Cale, you've got a room, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"We'll lock him up!"

"Say! w'ot's that?" the Keener cried.

"I'm goin' ter show you how spies are used when they light on me. You'll go under lock an' key, an' I guess you'll stay there until ye get gray-headed."

"Come off! If I did, I'd outgrow my pants before then. You must be jokin', admiral. Come, now, I ain't—"

But Chub cut all protests short and began to drag the Keener toward the stairs. The latter's first impulse was to shout for help, but there were three objections to this—perhaps no friendly person would hear him, Chub could stop him quickly, and the effort struck the captive as being something which would hurt his pride.

As a result he remained silent, but struggled so resolutely that Chub and Cale, combined, had to work hard to take him up the stairs.

As they reached the floor above the Keener chanced to look down and see Mag Mason. She was gazing up, and her worn face never had looked more sorrowful than then. Fred knew she felt pity for him, but he was equally certain that nothing would come of it.

He was borne into a room and flung heavily into a chair.

"There you are!" Chub exclaimed.

"Did you expect I thought I was on Brooklyn Bridge?" the Keener retorted.

"You never'll be there, again."

"Now, look here: what's all this fuss about? Why am I set upon like this? Why be you down on me?"

"Boy," the crook exclaimed, in an intense voice, "you never'll tell who did the sandbaggin'!"

"W'ot sandbaggin'?"

"Your innocence won't go down. Who set you ter dog me, anyhow?"

"Nobody," was the stout assertion.

"You're a liar."

"Mister, ef you know this story better'n I do, tell it yerself. I'll be darned ef I waste any more breath on it!"

Fred rightly felt that it would be a waste of breath, but Chub was not disposed to give up so easily. The prisoner turned his head away in disgust, but the captor persevered and subjected him to a close cross-questioning. He made nothing out of it. The Keener was merely flippant, and Chub found himself badly left.

He abandoned the effort, at last, in disgust, but his expression continued morose and ugly. He felt sure that trouble was afoot for him, and that the boy had come as the ally of a maturer enemy.

"Wal, keep yer mouth shut, ef you're bound ter," he finally exclaimed, viciously. "You'll get bumble before you see the outside o' this house. Bring a rope, Cale."

The rope was brought, and Chub tied the Keener's hands behind his back. To this the latter made no remonstrance, for he knew he could not change the current of events, and was too proud to beg for mercy.

"That'll do," the captor commented. "I'll leave you here, now. Once a day you'll get bread an' water, but no more. Ef you bawl, Cale will come in an' smash your jaw."

"That I will!" Cale cheerfully agreed.

"You can't make my jaws look worse than yours, gents," Fred coolly observed. "They look like circular saws, banged all out o' shape, but their sharpness is mostly wind."

Realizing that nothing was to be gained by talking with him, his captors left the room and locked the door after them. The Keener was left alone to meditate on his reverses. This he did in his usual way.

"Frederick Walsingham Mather, your name is McGinty Mud," he remarked. "You are worse off than a city alderman after he's been found out. You ain't up the river, but you're up Salt Creek an' down in the mouth. You're hoodooed an' hung up ter dry!"

He arose and walked to the one window of the room. This gave only a dim light, for it did not lead to the open air, but to some other room. The lower half was provided with shutters, and these, being closed and fastened, shut out his view completely, except that, by looking over the top, he could see the ceiling of the next room—but scant satisfaction.

He sat down again.

"I've got inter a fix, an' that hundred dollars o' Mrs. Redburn's don't look as big as it did. Guess I wasn't cut out fer a detective. S'pose I ought ter cave in an' shed a bar'l o' tears, but I ain't in practice at weepin'."

Despite this cheerful view of the case, he real-

ized that he was in a bad situation. He had come there without notifying any friend. Meg Mason knew where he was, and evidently felt pity for him, but she was wholly under the influence of Chub.

She was not likely to betray him to aid any one.

The Keener had a fierce struggle with his bonds, but, failing to get his hands free, gave it up and settled down to await the next turn of the tide with as much of philosophy as he could summon.

Hours passed; how many, he could not tell.

He grew very weary of the situation, and more than once was tempted to shout for help, but it was clear that his enemies would bear him first of all, and that it probably would result only in his being put under more painful restraint.

What was that?

A sound at the window, and the Keener looked up quickly. Pressed close to the glass was a human face. He saw it, surely, but it dropped out of sight before he could fairly impress it upon his mind!

"That's queer!"

He made the comment because the face had not been that of a bearded rough; it was a young, almost a childish face, he thought.

He watched for its reappearance eagerly. If a child, could he not enlist the person in his favor? Several minutes passed. He went to the window. He spoke in a guarded voice; there was no answer. Turning, he rapped on the shutters; there was no response.

Becoming weary, at last, he returned to his chair. Darkness thickened in the room, and he knew day was departing from the outside world.

"It's gone from me already," he thought, with a sigh. "This is ruther tough."

In a short time the shadows were so deep that he could see nothing except the upper part of the window, and that was but little lighter than the darkness around it.

Once more the Keener's head rose quickly. There was a sound at the window; a low, soft sound, and one which he could not fail to recognize.

The sash was being lowered!

Quickly he gained his feet, but his vision was not keen enough to tell what had been done there. All sound ceased. Was the window really open? He continued to look, and then, even in the dim light, he saw a round object appear. A human head; it could be nothing else. But the silence remained unbroken until even the strong-willed Keener began to grow nervous. Then at last came a low question:

"Is anybody there?"

"I'm here, b'jinks!" declared Fred.

"Who are you?"

"Who be you?" returned the prisoner, warily.

"What are you doing in there?"

"Fact is, I'm in quod. Say, pard, give me a lift, will ye? I take et you're a kid, like me, an' you must know w'ot it is ter be shut up like a bear in Central Park. Let a feller out, won't ye?"

"Fred, don't you know me?"

"Know ye? Who be ye? By crickey! it can't be you're Ches Lynn, can it?"

"That's just who I am."

"Great 'skeeters! Help me out—"

"Not so loud!" Ches cautioned. "Chub Mason and all his gang are here, and our very lives are in peril. It's good-by to us if they catch us!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHECK TO THE KING.

DUGALD FORRYSTER was considered a lucky man. He had inherited a fortune, and the money had been so left that all he had to do was to sit still and let it pour a fine income into his pocket. A trusty agent saw to the business, and as the results more than paid his most generous expenses, Mr. Forryster had never had cause to worry.

His two sons were more ambitious than he, and were in the remotest part of Oregon, trying to make fortunes of their own. This left only one child with the father, his daughter Zadah.

Forryster was not proud, and from their infancy his children had been taught that a poor man was just as good as a rich man. This was a very comfortable doctrine, and did much credit to Forryster; but he had never carried it beyond precept.

It was left for Zadah to furnish the practice, and she did it with a vengeance.

When it was announced that she was to marry Percy Berthrong, the question was common, Who was he? For several weeks Zadah

and her father had been trying to answer, but the measure of their success may be imagined when it is said that they did not even know themselves.

They had relied upon Mr. Berthrong for an answer, but his explanations never had explained much. Of course Dugald Forryster had investigated, but it had not amounted to much.

Berthrong had been reared in a quiet New Jersey town, but had left there at the age of eighteen, and his later acquaintance had been in New York. Several city men had spoken well of him, but Forryster thought they stood in need of recommendations, themselves, and had advised his daughter to give Berthrong up.

Unfortunately, Zadah had but little of what was boldly practical, to use a mild expression, and she clung to her lover. As a result, it was Forryster who gave way. He did it with misgiving, but with as much of outward cheerfulness as he could assume, and made ready for the wedding.

If the Forrysters had been of the Four Hundred the invited guests might not have swallowed Mr. Percy Berthrong, but the circle in which they moved bowed down to money rather than noble birth. The bride's father had money, and they were not particular as to the groom.

At the same time when Foxy Fred was languishing in bonds all was bustle and excitement at Forryster's, and preparations were being made for the grand event.

In due time the guests came.

So did Percy.

Mr. Berthrong looked well on this occasion. All suggestions of Guttenburg had been eliminated from his attire, and his tailor had almost made a new man of him. His clothing was modest, and he tried to be, though the gambler's fever was in his veins. Why shouldn't it be? He was playing for bigger stakes than he ever had seen up where the ivory chips clicked and the painted pasteboards brought joy or sorrow to those who held them.

The son of fortune behaved well. He had brought no gambler friend with him, but, having wheedled a weak young man of good family into acting as best man, was backed up by a solid wall of respectability.

The only weak point was just where Percy, himself, stood.

The eventful hour arrived, and so did the minister. The chief actors prepared for their parts in the play. Percy and Zadah faced the reverend gentleman, and the son of fortune was as demure as if he held a straight flush. The reverend gentleman cleared his throat in order to make his tones sonorous and mellifluous.

He was about to begin the ceremony when a messenger-boy appeared on the scene. In one hand he bore a long, neatly-folded document. He was, also, the bearer of a message, and he proceeded to deliver it in a clear voice:

"I have been sent here to give a wedding present to Miss Zadah Forryster, and it is the wish of the donor that it should be received at this moment. As it is valuable, it is to be hoped this novelty will be allowed."

The guests looked at the folded paper and then at each other.

"The deed of a house!" they whispered.

But Percy Berthrong's eyelids quivered strangely.

He did not like this interruption.

"I suggest that we wait until the ceremony is over," he put in, quickly, but as coolly as possible.

Zadah, however, had heard the whispers from her friends, and her spirits and ambition soared high. The paper was being held in front of her, and she disregarded her chosen one's protest.

"There's no time like the present," she cried, and caught at the present.

Quickly she unfolded it, her face gay and happy. She looked—then her smile faded away. Her face grew white. She stared at the paper in something that looked like dismay. Then she reeled and would have fallen had not the best man caught her in his arms.

She had fainted.

Percy Berthrong made a movement to secure the paper, which had fallen from her hand, but it had sailed away directly to Mr. Forryster's feet, and it was he who picked it up.

In turn he scanned it; in turn his face grew pale and startled.

The groom did not dare to interrupt. Every one else was silent, and the old gentleman looked to his fill. This done he thrust the document into his pocket. He glanced around, and then gave his orders:

"Take my daughter to her room. I request the guests to remain here until they receive fur-

ther directions. Mr. Berthrong, come with me!"

The last words were in a low voice, and the first had been so free from excitement the now startled guests found some ground to hope nothing serious had occurred outside of the bride's swoon—though that was hard to explain in a matter-of-fact way.

Mr. Berthrong was unable to find anything encouraging in the situation, and his steps and heart were alike heavy as he followed the master of the house to the library. Once there Forryster turned upon him abruptly, and the adventurer's fate was to be read in the older man's face.

"Sir," began the rich man, "do you know what this paper is?"

"No, sir."

"It is the copy of a marriage-certificate."

"Does it interest us?"

"Does it? Well, I should say it does, especially, you! 'Tis the proof of a marriage two years back. The bride was Mary Stannard; the groom's name was Percy Berthrong!"

"What?" cried the son of fortune, "is there another man with a name like mine? But, by my life!" he added, as if impressed with a sudden idea, "there is more to this than there seems. Some one has tried to play a scurvy trick on me; the intention is to blacken my reputation. No wonder Zadah fainted."

"Right, sir; right. No wonder she fainted. Any woman would, if she learned at the altar that her chosen husband was a bigamist!"

"A bigamist?"

"That's the word, sir."

"But it is false; infamously false, Mr. Forryster. I tell you it is a scurvy trick. An enemy, or some misguided friend, has done this. I declare sir, that I'm innocent. A bigamist? Never, never!"

"This document begins with the added headline, 'Copy of the marriage-certificate of Percy Berthrong and Mary Stannard—'"

"That's it; they admit it's only a 'copy.' What reliance can be placed on such a paper? Strong in my innocence, I—"

"And," pursued Forryster, grimly, "it ends with another added line: 'If the reliability of the above is doubted, consult the City Records at the Bureau of Vital Statistics.'"

Berthrong's face fell.

"If such a marriage took place, and the law was complied with," Forryster added, "the marriage is recorded at the above place."

"If it be recorded on the court house door, I am innocent!" declared Berthrong. "There may be another of the name, or a dozen; but that paper does not concern me. I am not married, and never was."

"Perhaps you will be able to prove it. We will not discuss the matter further now. I am going to dismiss the guests."

"Mr. Forryster," exclaimed Percy, eagerly, "if you will wait until Zadah recovers—"

"I must decline. Women's heads are weak when their hearts are at stake, and, however it might be with my daughter, I am not going to give her a chance to ally herself with a would-be bigamist."

Berthrong stood silent, and the rich man's gaze seemed to chill him through. Verily, the cards had not run well that night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAT UNDER THE LOUNGE.

FOXY FRED did not disregard the warning from Ches Lynn, and he lowered his voice as he answered:

"I'm painfully aware that there is danger of our bein' ketched. These ropes on my wrists prove it. All samee, I think I see a way fer us ter git out, ef you hev good luck, I reckon you're here fer that purpose."

"Yes," Ches agreed. "Can you stand up so I can cut those bonds?"

"Pard, I'm about helpless. You'll hev ter crawl in."

"Here I come!"

Ches swung himself over the top of the shutter, and in short order cut the cords.

"That's better," declared the Keener, much relieved. "Ches, you're a brick! But how in thunder did you come ter be 'round here?"

"I happened along the street just as you went in. I thought it was you, but wasn't sure. I waited for you to come out, but when you failed to appear, I began to be worried. I thought it wasn't right to leave until I was sure about it, so I found a boy who was acquainted with the house; and when I had questioned him, I went around back and come in by the rear door, unseen."

"Ches, you're a bully boy with an eagle eye. I'm proud ter hev sech a runnin' mate. I reckon that back door swings both ways!"

"Eh?"

"I mean, kin we go out as neat as you come in?"

"I wish I knew. Chub Mason, Eph and another man are playing cards in a room near the hall. The door is open, and I expected to be seen coming in, but I waited until they began to laugh over something in the play, and then hurried past the door."

"Good boy, Ches! But can't we go out the front way, an' avoid them?"

"No. Men are now in the reading-room, and a guard is at the street-door."

"By crickey! we don't want ter see him. We'll do the back-way act. Come on!"

The Keener grasped the top of the shutter, and, being cautioned by Ches, drew himself over without noise. The smaller adventurer followed, and then proceeded to explain the line of retreat. The ball was just ahead, and they started along this.

When the door of the card-room was reached, they became on the alert, but utter silence there was followed by the discovery that the room was vacant.

Greatly elated, they went to the outer door, but Chester's face suddenly assumed an expression of dismay.

"It's locked!" he whispered.

"Where's the key?"

Foxy Fred failed to see the article indicated, but his prolific mind soon found another plan.

"Skedaddle inter the card-room, an' then git out o' ther winder!" he directed.

To the card-room they went, but they found both windows nailed down. This unpleasant fact was still revolving in their minds when voices and footsteps sounded in the hall.

"Ter cover!" cried the Keener, and he made a dive for the space under the lounge.

It was a close fit, but made an admirable cover.

Ches seemed to be a trifler rattled, but he managed to get crouched down behind the stove before any one appeared. Then Chub and his two companions re-entered, wiping their bearded lips and looking happy.

They resumed card-playing.

"Your deal, Eph," reminded Chub. "Bet yer I get a full hand."

"I won't give ye better'n a pair o' trays," declared Eph, shuffling.

"I'll 'fill,' then," Chub asserted.

"What's our game, ter Berthrong's?" grumbled the third man. "He's got a hand that can't be beat."

"An' a wife that can't be 'beat.' He will hev ter sail low, or his rich dad will disinherit him."

"Things don't go even in this world," declared Chub. "Here we're strugglin' in poverty, while Perce gets loaded with cash by scoopin' in old Forryster's daughter."

"What of Maze shows up?"

"Then Perce will be nabbed fer bigamy—if she squeals on him."

"If? Why shouldn't she? She's got the dump."

"No doubt she now hates him like sin, but Perce is a long-headed feller. It wouldn't surprise me ter see him get Maze shut up, an' keep her there."

"He'd better, ef he wants any peace. Perce is airy an' confident, but things don't look so rosy for him as they might. Now, there's that man from Ohio. He may make trouble."

"I ain't so sure o' that; the boss give him a great biff with the sandbag."

"Say, who is that Buckeye duck, anyhow?"

"Don't know, exactly, but it seems he come on here on some errand which would make it hot for Perce. The hayseed had a wrong to wipe out. He come near gettin' wiped out himself. Perce biffed him, stole his papers, an' then left him sprawlin'."

"I don't bear o' him in the papers, as a hospital subjick."

"He must be there. Mebbe the coppers are layin' low. The old chap played in hard luck. He come on here, ef I git it right, ter see about a gal, or boy, o' his own; I don't know which. It was his child, anyhow, an' Perce had done him dirty. Now, he's fell on the old man. Guess the hayseed fam'ly ain't stuck on the boss, an' more."

All three of the roughs laughed at this, as if it was the best joke imaginable, but Foxy Fred was not of the same opinion. He remembered the stricken man at Doctor McNab's, and registered a vow to bring his assailants to justice. If there had been any doubt as to their identity,

Foxy Fred, the Keener.

before there was none now, and he intended to notify the police.

Just then, however, the Keener had all he could do to attend to his own affairs.

The conversation between Chub and his companions had not been continuous. The card-playing had been going on briskly, and the usual terms of poker had spiced the other subject. The zeal with which they played was not indicative of early adjournment, and the Keener and Ches were fast prisoners until they did adjourn.

Still, it was better than being shut up in the other room, and Foxy Fred would have been quite philosophical had it not been for one fear.

What if some one should look into the room where he had been confined?

That meant the discovery of the fact that he was missing, and consequent search for him.

Shortly after the conversation recorded, there was a clinking sound on the floor and a dog trotted into the room. Now, the Keener had always been an admirer of dogs, and he liked to see them around, but in this case he did not feel that way. Chub and his allies were very dangerous, but the dog was more so. Unless led by a general search the men were not likely to look under the lounge, while the dog—

The dog dropped his nose to the floor and walked directly toward the lounge.

"Oh! you fiend!" thought the Keener.

The dog thrust his nose under the furniture. Fred had receded as far as the wall would allow and the dog was too big to follow easily. He looked at Fred, snuffed and whined. Then he began to claw at the floor, and incidentally did some more whining.

"Stop it, you brute!" growled Chub.

The dog answered by running to the speaker and thrusting his nose against Chub's hand, as evidence that he wanted attention, but the man boxed his ears and he retired abashed. He did not forget his ruling impulse, however, and he again poked his head under the Keener's refuge and clawed at the floor.

"Rat under the lounge, I guess," remarked Eph; and the third man added:

"They have the biggest rats in this house I ever seen anywhere."

Nobody commented on this statement, but if the lounge had been overturned, the trio would have agreed that the rodent in this case was a very large "rat."

Foxy Fred duly noticed the rough's erroneous idea, but saw no joke about it. In the past he had seen some illustrations of the pertinacity of dogs, and this particular canine's curiosity threatened to do mischief. Once let him make himself a nuisance to his friends and they would be certain to move the lounge, to end it.

The rebuff from Chub was a good thing for the boys, for the dog kept his feelings somewhat under, but he tried the lounge from every point, and poked about with his nose, and whined a lament because he could not get at the Keener.

Finally, he ceased operations and stood still, a meditative air hanging around him. Then he turned and walked toward the stove.

Fred saw this with dismay.

There was no obstruction to prevent his getting at Ches.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE POINT OF DISCOVERY.

FOXY FRED felt that he was in the worst kind of a fix. Cramped up under the lounge he could not make a dash for liberty, if it came to that, and it seemed certain that the dog would make trouble for Ches.

The animal moved around the stove. This object was large, and wholly concealed him, and the Keener could only rely upon his hearing for information. Much to his surprise, however, there was no disturbance, there, and the seconds wore on with the situation as peaceful as ever.

Then the dog reappeared. Evidently, he had investigated in the other quarter, and his lack of hostility encouraged Fred so much that, when the canine nose was again thrust under the lounge, the boy put out his hand to make friends with the investigator.

It was a mistake, for the dog snarled and snapped at the hand viciously.

"Say, what in sin ails Tempest?" Eph demanded.

"Got the jim-jams!"

"Or a nightmare."

These suggestions did not satisfy Eph. He had just lost heavily on four queens, and felt like taking a recess. He rather welcomed Tempest's demonstration.

"There's ter be no peace here until the dog has a chance ter get at things. There must be a hole in the wall, and I dare say the rats are thumin'.

their noses at him. I'll pull the lounge away, and give the dog full play!"

He rose and walked forward.

Foxy Fred set his teeth and prepared to leap up the moment he was uncovered.

Eph laid hold of the lounge.

At that moment there was a new sound at the door, and a man entered. Eph paused and, like his fellows, looked toward that point. They saw a man who was supposed to be elsewhere—Percy Berthrong, in brief. He was still in his fine bridal costume, but he did not look like a happy groom. On the contrary, his clothes were rumpled, his face flushed and sullen, and the odor of whisky prevailed where he walked.

"Thunder! you back?" exclaimed Chub.

Berthrong sat down heavily.

"Where in perdition do you think I am?" he demanded, sharply.

"Why, you're here."

"Then I'm not in the mayor's chair, am I?"

"You may git inter a cell at the lock-up, ef you pile on that jag much more."

"Say, boss," more sympathetically asked Eph, "what about the weddin'?"

Mr. Berthrong threw his head back and spoke. At the end of three minutes he had given no direct information, but had fired out certain strong, but disconnected speeches which, in their lurid picturesqueness, made even the old-timers before him sit dazed and silent. As they could say nothing when he finished, he finally pulled himself together and spoke intelligibly:

"The wedding has gone to smash!"

"No!"

"Indefinitely postponed, and all the guests sent home. Guests mystified; bride in a swoon; bride's father hot under the collar; groom drunk!"

So saying, Percy kicked the dog and slid down in his chair until his head nearly went through his collar.

"What's done it?" Chub asked, in dismay.

"What? What do you suppose? Whosould it be but a woman? Who ruins all the men?"

"Was it Maze?"

"Sure! The tigress sent a copy of our marriage-certificate, and had it presented to old Forryster's girl just as we were to be married. You can guess the result—but I've told you already."

"That was a shabby trick o' Maze's."

"Shabby! Why, she's ruined me! Curse the luck! I've used that woman square, and I told her if she would let me go I'd pension her off. Of course I didn't tell her I was to marry again, but she kicked up a row all the same; said I was her husband, and she wouldn't let me go. Of all selfish beings women are the worst! Well, she found out I was going to marry over again, in some way; and then she dropped on me. It must have been she who sent that bombshell. Well, it's the same old story; a man ruined by a woman!"

Berthrong glared at vacancy, and meditated on the evil ways of women in general and wives in particular, and his friends looked and verbally expressed their sympathy.

At last Chub broke the silence:

"What are you going ter do about it?"

"Do?" hissed Berthrong; "I'm going to find Maze, and I'll make her pay for her spitefulness as debt never was paid before. I'll get her into my power, and I'll imprison her somewhere and put her through a course of torture to which the work of the old-time inquisitors will be as nothing. Every means I can devise shall be used. She shall live a living death!"

Foxy Fred shivered at the fiendish expression on the speaker's face, and the tone of his voice, and thought it was lucky that "Maze" was not then present.

"Perhaps you can smooth it over with old man Forryster," Eph suggested.

"No; the warning bade him go to the Bureau of Vital Statistics, and if he does that he will find that I really was married to Maze. Oh! the game is up, sure, and my only satisfaction will be to get square with Maze."

"We'll trust you to do that."

"You can!"

Berthrong struck the table violently, whereupon the dog, who had been lingering near him, howled and started for the lounge again.

"You slugged old Jordan all fer nothin', boss," remarked Chub.

"Yes; and lost something which may land me in prison. I'd give a cool fifty for that watch-charm. I'm afraid it's in the hands of the police. Say, what in perdition ails that dog?"

Tempest was again reconnoitering under the lounge.

"It's rats," explained Chub.

"I'm goin' ter give the dog a chance."

Eph said this, and once more he moved forward to pull the lounge away. Again, too, the Keener felt that his last hope was gone. Woe be unto him if Percy Berthrong found a spy there at that stage of affairs!

"Hang the rats!" ejaculated Perce. "I want a drink, and I invite all of you to imbibe with me. Come on, and let the rats go to blazes!"

Eph had paused as the word "drink" fell upon his auricular organs, and he promptly obeyed the call to arms. The Keener had another reprieve, and, what was better, all four men went out of the room at once. Tempest had not been included in the invitation, but he went with the crowd.

Quickly Foxy Fred came out of his hiding-place.

"Ches, old boy, we've got ter skip!" he exclaimed.

He looked around anxiously.

"Door locked, and all the windows nailed up. Say, we've got ter sneak out the front way."

"There's a guard at the door," reminded Ches.

"Can't help it; it's our only show."

Ches hesitated and looked at the windows.

"I'm sure we wouldn't be allowed to go out,

and every moment is of great value. I move we break the window! It's only a dash after that, and we shall be safe."

"I'm with you, my hearty!"

Fred seized a chair and, going close to the window, sent it crashing through. Glass and sash alike disappeared, and the desired opening was at hand, but so much noise had been made that it was certain they could not escape too quickly.

The Keener sprung through like a gymnast and then gave his companion a lift, and both were soon on the other side. Behind them the barking of the dog was to be heard, and they ran on.

They were in a back yard, but not of the usual kind. There was a clear passage to the next street, and they were fast approaching the exit when two men loomed up in advance. The runners naturally attracted attention.

"What's this?" demanded one.

"Something's wrong. Seize them!"

"Dodge, an' skip, Ches!" ordered Fred.

The direction was successfully obeyed, though Ches only escaped capture by a hair's breadth, as it were, and then they dashed on toward the point of safety. It was a great relief when their feet once more touched a city street.

"But we can't loaf 'round here," declared Fred. "Them skunks will be after us, an' they'd swear a wooden Injun's life away. Let's take a sneak!"

This was done so successfully that they soon found themselves several blocks away, and their safety was assured.

"That's w'ot I call a close rub," commented the Keener. "I've been through enough, ter-day, ter turn white beir black, but there's enough left o' me ter lick Perce & Co.!"

CHAPTER XL.

HUNTING HUMAN GAME.

"Is Mrs. Redburn in?"

Foxy Fred asked the question, the next morning, at the house where his lady employer was residing, and when investigation showed that she was in, he was conducted to her presence.

"Fine mornin', mum!" he observed.

"Yes," Mrs. Redburn answered. "You are around at an early hour."

"The early worm ketches the bird's eye," remarked the Keener, enigmatically.

"Have you any news?"

"An artom; jest an artom," and Fred shut one eye and nodded gravely. "Fact is, I've had a brush with them toughs—an' crooks, an' ef you want ter pay me my hundred dollars, you kin let 'er twinkle. Perce Berthrong is the duck that did the dark deed, an' a hand-cart ride ter the Tombs would about fit his requirements."

"Tell me all."

It was a long story, but the Keener went through it eloquently. In particular, he set out the scene in the card-room in strong colors.

"You kin see that it was Perce who smote C. E. Jordan, of Poland, O., an' I wuz in favor of hevin' him nabbed at once, but my pard, Ches, when he heerd the story—I tol' him all, mum, 'cause he had proved he was a good 'un—he advised me ter come ter you, bein's how you was my boss, an' let you hear the whole story before I proceeded fer ter act."

"I'm glad you did," Mrs. Redburn answered.

"While Mr. Jordan lies unconscious I don't think it would be wise to trouble Berthrong.

Just what the Ohio man's errand to New York was we don't know. We may do damage by being too precipitate."

"All right, mum."

The Keener responded readily, though he was not a little disappointed by the decision.

"A message I have just received from Doctor McNabb tells me that Jordan is not improved."

"He takes his time fer gettin' wal," Fred grumbled. "W'ot be I goin' ter do while I wait? I s'pose ef I knew where ter look fer 'Maze,' Berthrong's wife, I might find her, an' warn her."

"She is likely to keep under cover."

"She'd botter, or Meg Mason will do her up. Meg is so stuck on Chub, an' ez he's told her ter betray Maze, Meg will do it."

"Let us think of Jordan, rather than these wretched women. If we only could learn why he came to New York—"

A servant knocked at the door.

"Doctor McNabb would like to see you, ma'am," was the announcement.

The applicant was soon at hand.

"I've got a telegram from Poland, Ohio, at last," he stated. "Jordan don't live there."

"Then we're wholly at loss."

"Yes. The hotel register, there, has the name, Cyrus E. Jordan, for the 12th instant, followed by the address, Chicago, Ill," but I've been to the commercial agency, on University Place, and seen a city Directory of Chicago. The name of Cyrus E. Jordan is not therein, and I think the Windy City never fails to register every man they can lay hands on. Inference: Jordan, if a Chicago man, must be a new-comer there, and would be correspondingly hard to locate."

"That's tough!"

The Keener made the declaration, and every one agreed with him. Then they discussed the matter fully, but could only arrive at the decision that they must give Jordan time to recover in a measure.

"I might go 'round an' see the hotel registers, here," remarked Fred, "but there's about a million of them, an' nobody ever kin tell where a stranger will put up when he blows inter town."

Seeing nothing further to do, the Keener left the house and walked away, shortly after.

He had no definite plan in view, and was moving slowly along, mentally lamenting the delay, when a familiar form appeared not far away.

It was that of Meg Mason.

The woman looked haggard, as if she had passed a sleepless night, or several of them, and a certain expression on her face impressed Foxy Fred most unpleasantly. She looked at several of the passers-by as she walked, but never at the men. For those of her own sex she had a most intense and unpleasant stare, as if she would devour them with her eyes. The reason of this quickly became apparent to the Keener.

Meg was a woman-hunter!

She was looking for Maze!

To Fred this fact was not only startling, but mournful. The two women had been companions in misfortune. Each had wasted affection on a villain. Alike they had suffered neglect, insults and abuse, and as they must have known each other well, each must have been witness to the other's sorrows.

Doomed to the same hard fate they should have felt keenly for each other, but Meg was now prepared to betray her friend for the sake of getting the good will of a man, who, as her common sense ought to have told her, would forget all, the moment she ceased to be useful.

The Keener hung back, fearful that he would be recognized, but he might have spared his pains. In her wild hunt for human game, Meg saw only those who were like the one she sought —only women.

There was some one else there who was attentive to Meg. A man suddenly ran into Foxy Fred with force which made the latter's anger rise. He turned to remonstrate warmly, but said nothing. The man was young; he was partially intoxicated; he was looking at Meg in a strange and intent way.

Suddenly he walked up to her.

"Say, what fiend's work are you engaged in?" he demanded, sharply.

She was slow in turning her own gaze upon him, and then she seemed to find the sight of no interest. She turned away impatiently.

"Oh! you can't shake me like that!" he exclaimed.

"Keep away!" she ordered. "I don't know you."

"Don't know me! What's the use of lying? You know me well, and I know you and your

gang only too well. Too well! My ruin lies at your door!"

He swung his arms wildly, but Foxy Fred was unable to tell whether it was the effects of liquor or something else. Meg certainly did not seem to know him, and she returned, more impatiently than before:

"I never saw you in my life."

"You are all bound up in lies. Now, look here!—I want to talk with you. I am on my last legs, and it is all owing to the gang. I fell afoul of you, and what is the result? I am a wreck! Now, I want you to act for me. I want money, and I want it the worst way; I must have it. I want you to go to the leader of the gang and get it. Have you no pity? Don't you see how hard-up I am? Can't you help a feller when he is 'way down? I've got a mother, I have; and you ought to be woman enough to feel for me. Won't you give a rundown dog a lift?"

The young man swayed to-and-fro on his feet, and tears ran down his cheeks. It was a melancholy sight to see one of his youth and strength in such a condition, but the tears were of maudlin nature.

What cause be had for his complaints Fred could not tell, but he took it all in eagerly.

Meg Mason was too much absorbed in her own mania to heed any other person's. In a certain way she must have realized what his allusions to "the gang" meant, even if she did not know the young man, but she would not miss any female passer-by. Irritably shaking off the hand he had laid on her arm, she answered:

"Let me alone!"

Then he grew angry.

"So you won't hear to me?" he cried. "You won't give me any chance to save myself? By heavens! I won't stand any more of this. I may be a dog that's to be kicked into the gutter, but I'm not a dog that will slink in a back-alley after being kicked. If I am despised and cast off, I'll show my teeth! I'll be revenged on somebody! I'll—"

The drunken man had grown violent. He seized Meg roughly and shook her savagely. She was accustomed to usage like this, and made no outcry, but a patrolman had been advancing, and he now brought his locust down on the assailant's hand with force which made the latter release his hold quickly.

The unknown saw the policeman, and all of his aggressiveness disappeared. He seemed to sober up in a breath, and with this condition came one of fear. He would have taken to his heels, but the policeman held him fast.

Then he stared in pale-faced dismay.

"I ain't done anything," he protested, huskily.

"Ain't you? Well, we'll let a justice decide that. I'm going to run you in."

CHAPTER XII.

CHUB MEDITATES TREACHERY.

THE policeman punched his prisoner in the ribs with his club, in the nonchalant way peculiar to blue-coats, but the latter did not resent it. He stood silent, speechless with fear. The threat of actual arrest had taken his last atom of strength away, and he was an abject coward.

"I don't think he meant anything wrong, officer," remarked Meg Mason, her usually active sympathies aroused. "He didn't do me any harm."

"Do you know him?" the patrolman asked.

"No, sir."

"Jest an ordinary drukk, is he?"

"Yes."

"Then I won't take the labor of appearing against him to-morrow. Here, you lusher, get out of this, quick! If I find you on my beat again, I'll pull you, s'elp me! Get to blazes out of here!"

Again he punched the drunken man in the ribs, and gave him a push. The fellow started quickly, but the blue-coat had some fear that he would not keep going, and, not wanting to be bothered with him, he turned his back upon the stranger and walked away.

Thus it was that nobody was about to interfere when, after the latter had gone a few yards, he was accosted by another man. In this person, Foxy Fred, who was keenly observant of everything, had already recognized an old acquaintance. It was Chub Mason, and the way in which he had advanced, while this scene was transpiring, indicated that he was watching Meg, to see if she did her work properly.

The stranger almost ran into Chub, who seized him roughly by the arm.

"You fool!" he exclaimed, "w'ot are ye tryin' ter do, anyhow?"

The younger man's face brightened.

"Oh, Chub!" he cried, "save me, save me!"

"Save nothin'! Quit yer howlin', or you'll bev a dozen coppers after you, instead o' one. Don't yer know any better than ter git a jag on ye an' go sailin' around the streets?"

"I was desperate."

"You must 'a' been, you blamed idiot!"

"Chub, you don't understand. I have no one to stay with me; no one to talk to, to break the awful solitude; nothing but the bare walls of my wretched little room to look at. My conscience and my fears drove me almost crazy, and I came out and poured down liquor madly. You never saw me drunk before. This is the work of despair. Chub, if only you and Percy would come to see me—"

"W'ot 've we got ter do with yer?" growled Chub.

"You've had too much to do with me; you've ruined me; that's what you've done. If I were to tell the police all I know—"

"Easy, now," interrupted the tough, less belligerently. "You can't frighten us with threats; we've got a 'pull,' an' nobody kin run us in. But, look you, I never go back on nobody; I won't go back on you ef you're sensible. Jest you go home an' stay there, an' I'll drop around an' see you just as soon as I attend to a little biz I hev on hand. Wait a bit, though! I can soon attend to it; you stay right here until I come back. Eh?"

"This is rather too public a place," hesitatingly returned the stranger.

"It'll be all right, fer I won't keep ye waitin' but a second. Stay right here!"

Chub hastened away, and his companion remained, though manifestly ill at ease. The liquor had in a measure got out of his muddled brain, and having some reason for being afraid of his fellow-men, he realized the danger he had before overlooked.

Foxy Fred realized it even more keenly. He had marked Chub's varying moods, and the cunning expression of his face, and was so sure that the crook intended some treachery that he watched him. Chub had taken a cross-street, but the Keener stood on the corner and was able to watch without trouble.

The patrolman was receding slowly, and Chub followed with such rapid steps that he soon overtook the former. He accosted him, pointing back, and both looked whence the crook had come.

Fred caught on to the situation and, hastening to the young man's side, spoke quickly:

"Say, mister, you'd better hustle away from here instanter!"

"Why?"

"'Cause Chub has collared a cop, an' ef signs ain't all out o' plum, he's goin' ter tow him down here ter arrest you!"

The wretched stranger turned pale. He was prepared to credit any treacherous act on Chub's part, and he confusedly exclaimed:

"Great heavens! what am I to do?"

"Do? You'll run like a Guttenburg twenty-one 'shot.' You ain't much 'count on thebettin', but et all depends on yer legs. Come with me; I'll be jockey, an' I'm habile ter git ye ter the wire before the favorites git the dust out o' their eyes. See?"

The enterprising Keener already had his new friend under way, and his brisk manner made due impression upon the latter. Not much time was allowed them, but by stepping lively they turned a corner in safety, and then Fred conducted his charge along until the danger of arrest seemed over.

"Mister," he then announced, "you're all hunk."

"Bless you, boy; bless you! You've saved me, and I am very grateful."

"I don't know why I did it."

"Eh?"

"How do I know but you're a crook?"

The man was silent.

"They wanted ter pull ye in, an' I know from your way that you's afeerd of it. Here I've been an' bucked ag'in' the law, an' all fer a man I don't know from Adam. Why, you may be Cain, fer all I kin tell."

"Boy, you have made no mistake. I am a most miserable and unhappy wretch, but I am not all bad. If I have erred it was because others led me into crime."

"Chub an' Perce Berthrong?"

"What do you know of them?"

"Enough so I ain't their friend. I don't b'lieve you be, an' they certainly ain't your friends. See? Ef you don't, go back an' show yer face ter the copper that Chub tried ter set on yer. Bad egg, Chub is; never seen a meaner game than he tried ter play on you."

"Every one is against me!"

"Don't git down-hearted, mister; a good backbone is more than gold an' silver. Whar's yer room?"

"Over yonder."

"Go in there before you git inter trouble."

"The advice is wise; I ought not to have come out at all. I will go in, if you'll go with me. The solitude is almost unbearable."

The Keener thought he was interested in every one who was hated by Berthrong and his party, so he did not refuse the invitation. The man's room proved to be one of small dimensions, and poorly furnished. Once inside he motioned Fred to a chair, and then himself sat down and began to smoke.

"W'ot's yer name?" the boy asked.

"Dan Gray."

"You don't say it as if you've sailed under it long," quoth Frederick, shrewdly, "but let that pass. Mister, w'ot's your trouble, anyhow?"

"Don't ask me. Bebold in me a man who has gone to the dogs; who has yielded to temptation, and done that which has ruined his best of friends; and whose folly and evil courses have made him a fugitive from justice."

"You put it pretty strong, mister, but I can prescribe no cure unless I kin know the canker that's a-gnawin' of ye. See?"

"I can tell nothing."

Dan Gray did not tell anything, but he clung to Fred tenaciously as a break to the solitude, and kept him as long as he would stay. The Keener did not waste the time. Dan was seven years his senior, but he became the counselor in this hour, and gave advice which would have done credit to a far older head. He found it hard to believe that Dan had done anything very bad, and was interested in seeing Chub's wishes frustrated.

Idle as the Keener seemed, he was not wholly occupied with doing nothing. On the table between them was a jumble of different articles, and Fred noticed among them, a newspaper-clipping. This would scarcely have drawn more than passing attention had he not noticed that, at one point a hole was visible in the clipping, as if two or three words had been cut out.

This was so significant that he determined to read the note, and he maneuvered to do this without Dan Gray having knowledge of it.

He gradually worked the clipping around in front of him, all the while talking innocently to Dan, until, at last, he had it where he wanted it.

Then he read it, and what he read proved to be at once surprising, interesting and perplexing.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON ETERNITY'S BRINK.

THE clipping read as follows:

"It is reported that — — —, agent's bookkeeper for Mr. Dugald Forryster, has gone wrong. It is known that he has been keeping fast company, and he has now disappeared. The disappearance of a certain sum of money at the same time has led to a partial examination of the books, and it has been found that he falsified the records in order to cover up the deficit, probably not intending, then, to flee, himself. It is believed that further examination will reveal other evidences of peculation."

Significant, indeed, was this note, and Foxy Fred would have been dull had he not suspected, at once, that the dishonest bookkeeper was before him.

No doubt the words cut out had been the name of the absconder.

Another name occurred there, and the Keener could not help wondering to see this case, like another, point to Dugald Forryster. The latter seemed to be in hard luck. How much his agent's bookkeeper had taken nobody yet knew, but Fred did not doubt that it was in his power to earn a reward by making known what he knew.

Obedient a sudden impulse he tossed the clipping over to his companion.

"Reads well, don't it, mister?"

Dan Gray looked, and then his face paled.

"Where did you get this?"

"Right here on your table."

"Did I leave it?"

Dan stopped short, and the Keener dryly replied:

"I reckon you did, mister. Foolish of you, wasn't it! Dead give away, by crickey!"

"You know my secret; you know all, and it's in your power to ruin me. One word to the police, and I go to Sing Sing, never again to see the open world in many years. Guilty? Yes; I am guilty! — a miserable, ungrateful wretch. Ruin me, if you will!"

Dan Gray had grown violent. He swung his arms about, and his voice rose to a dangerous pitch. He had lost all composure, and evidently hated himself more than any one else could hate him. Foxy Fred shook his head. He felt that he ought to notify the police, but was reluctant to look upon Dan as a criminal.

"Did ye really take the money?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why? Because the devil tempted me, and the devil's name is Percy Berthrong. I was young and green; he was old in sin. He made me admire him, and then led me on to crime. I took the money so I could dress as he dressed, and spend money as freely as he!"

It was the old story, and it did not need the Keener's enmity against Berthrong to stir his sympathies. Dan Gray, disadvantageously as he had first appeared to Fred, had not a bad face. It was a comely face, and manly; and his young companion found it hard to believe he was as bad as his own confession would seem to prove him. He realized that the dazzling show Berthrong made, and his superior age, would naturally give him much influence over a boy of twenty, or twenty-one.

"Dan'l," spoke the Keener, "can't you pay up that squandered cash?"

"No."

"W'ot're ye gwine ter do?"

"Serve time."

Fred shook his head and meditated. He could not step in and pay the bill, nor did he know any one else who would. Yet, whatever might be his duty, he was determined not to go to the police. Others might betray this unhappy wretch, but he lacked the heart to do it.

He made this plain in few words, and then proceeded to give some advice. It was not easy in this case, but he had a way of getting at matters very unusual to one of his years, and he made the most of the situation.

He lingered with Dan until noon, and then went home for dinner. There he found a note from Mrs. Redburn, which invited him to call on her at eight o'clock that evening. Shortly after, he went out and, by chance, happened on Ches Lynn.

His ally was eager to tell something.

"Here's a paper I found in the street," he said. "See if you can make anything out of it. You'll find a familiar name in it, and it may be of interest."

The Keener read as follows:

"SIR:—Am always at home after 11:00 P. M., but never before. No. — South street. Come any evening. J. P. JONES."

"To C. E. JORDAN, Esq."

"Hello!" quoth the Keener, "where'd you git this?"

"In the street, as I said; over near where you said your Aunt Jane lived."

"Crickey! that's within three blocks o' where our C. E. Jordan was swatted with the sandbag. Must be the same gent, especially as this paper is soiled an' grimy, as ef it's been trampin' round the streets fer a day or two. Wal, now, this is interestin', fer J. P. Jones may be able ter tell us where Jordan's home base is. Guess it'll pay me ter drop around an' see him thiseve. In the mean while, le's take a cruise."

They took a "cruise" accordingly, and wandered around where Berthrong and his allies were likely to be, but saw none of them.

At five o'clock Ches said he had an engagement, and the Keener put in some further time alone, but did not forget Mrs. Redburn. At the specified hour he called upon her.

"I want you to go to Brooklyn with me," she explained.

"All right. W'ot's up?"

"I think I have clew to a woman I want to find, and am going there to see. I don't care to be out late without a protector."

"Mum, you'll be perfectly safe with me," Fred answered, with dignity. "Them Brooklynites ain't so 'way-up in good sassity as New Yorkers, but one New York feller kin lick three Brooklynites. I'll take good keer of you."

The Keener smiled humorously at his own conceit, and Mrs. Redburn made ready for the journey. Then they left the house, proceeded down-town, crossed the East River Bridge, and went to a house on Henry street. Whatever her business was, it was not successful. The person she wished to see was not in, and had not been seen for several days. A boarder, there, she had gone and left no word.

The inquirers retraced their steps with Mrs. Redburn in a meditative mood.

On arriving at the Bridge, she said:

"Let us walk across. The moon is shining

brightly, and it will be more pleasant than in the cars."

The Keener saw that he had ample time to get to South street, and they started. On the Brooklyn incline they found nothing of more interest than the moon, but, shortly after passing the eastern tower, Fred found something else to say:

"There's one female woman out all alone. She don't seem so interested in the heavenly orbs as in the river. Not much good ter look down that pokerish hole at night, I should say."

"Her attitude is one of deep dejection."

"Can't be she's meditat'in' a jump ter rival Steve Brodie, kin it?"

Mrs. Redburn did not answer, and, as they approached, both continued to gaze at the woman, who was standing at the side of the promenade and leaning over the space where, far below, the lordly East River's water rolled. There was something peculiar in her manner; she was not like an idle sight-seer or a dreamer; and they kept watch of her without knowing why.

Suddenly she started, as if from deep thought, but her next movement was startling.

She caught hold of the support above and began to draw herself up to the top of the guard-rail. This done, she poised herself on top.

"Crickey! she's goin' ter jump off!"

The words escaped Foxy Fred's lips, and then Mrs. Redburn aroused from the cold chill which had settled upon her when the unknown's purpose became apparent.

"Save her!" she gasped. "Quick!"

The Keener dashed forward. He was too wise to call to the woman, for any one bent on suicide would only hasten their movements if they saw their plans in danger. His feet fell lightly, and she continued to gaze down like one fascinated.

What strange power had that awful depth over her troubled brain?

"May Heaven preserve her!" murmured Mrs. Redburn. "Fred!—will he be in time?"

It was a matter of doubt, for, once more, the woman stirred. She released her hold above and stood without other support than for her feet. Then she bent forward for the fatal leap.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DANGEROUS COMPANY.

"COME in out o' the wet!"

Foxy Fred spoke the words coolly. A moment before he had seized the unknown woman just in time to prevent her wild leap. The sharp backward pull he had given had done more than to check her fall; it pulled her back to the promenade, and Fred barely escaped falling under her weight.

As it was he kept his footing, and then followed his nonchalant speech. He had narrowly saved her from death, and the moment was thrilling, but nothing worried him.

The woman tried to tear herself away.

"Let me go!" she cried.

"Where?"

"To death!"

"Not any, mum; you can't take no swim here. Besides, life is too valuable ter fling away—"

"Mine is not!"

"Then you really wanted ter jump?"

"I did; I wanted to end my miserable life; to seek oblivion. Oh! why did you stop me? Let me go; let me go!"

"Mum, you may as wal take it easy. I ain't goin' ter allow no sech work as this. I'm a sort o' special perleeceman, an' bound ter prevent it. Die? Great Cæsar, why should ye, when the folks who hev ter die would give their last dollar ter live?"

"Their lives are not barren, desolate, hopeless, like mine. You are cruel to stop me!"

"See here! ain't I met you before?"

Foxy Fred asked the question suddenly, for he believed he had discovered something familiar about her. She vividly recalled the veiled woman he had met at night near Berthrong's house, who had claimed the name of Meg Mason, but who, he had since been led to believe, had no right to the name.

"I know not; I care not," she returned, impatiently.

"Never called yerself Meg Mason, did ye?"

Now, she looked at the questioner more attentively.

"If I did, it isn't my name," she answered.

"I kin believe that, but you must hev a name of some sort. W'ot is it?"

"I decline to say."

She looked toward the point from which she had tried to jump, but the Keener shook his head.

"Keep yer eyes on me. We can't hev no sech goin's on as that. Et's ag'inst the law ter commit suicide, an' I am down on it, too; can't allow any sech work. Why, we may hev our troubles ter wear on us, but this is a glorious old world, an' the finest spot on earth lays right along this river. Why any one lucky enough ter live in New York should want ter commit sech a desp'rit deed I can't see."

Mrs. Redburn had been silent, but she now came close to the would-be suicide.

"Madam," she spoke, in a low, earnest voice, "I beg that you will listen to our well-meant advice. I, too, have seen trouble, and I know how hard some crosses are to bear, but let us not forget that we owe a duty to ourselves. While there is life, there's hope. Let us not rashly take the life confide to our keeping by One who knows when to take it."

The stranger was silent. There was much of persuasion and sympathy in Mrs. Redburn's voice, and it appealed to her strongly. She stood in silence, looking down. Mrs. Redburn saw she had made an impression and renewed her efforts, being the more anxious because she saw by the unknown's face that she was intelligent and far from being of a vicious walk in life. Indeed, it was a good face, full of honesty, and, obviously, such a person was well worth saving.

Foxy Fred felt that he had better keep silent, then, and he stood back and let Mrs. Redburn do all the talking.

She won a victory. The stranger was moved and persuaded, and finally began to weep. The suicidal fever was gone, and in one breath she thanked her new friend and promised not to repeat her rash attempt.

"Where do you live?" Mrs. Redburn asked.

"In New York."

"And your name?"

"I cannot tell that; I can tell no more, now. I want time to think. When I have decided what to do you may hear from me again—if you will give your own name and address."

"I will do so, gladly, and if I can help you, I will. Come to me freely. I should be glad to take you along, now, but if you say otherwise, your every wish shall be respected; only hear this in mind: you must not meditate suicide again."

Again the unknown promised, and, presently, all three walked toward New York. She acted quite naturally, and there seemed good reason to believe she would keep her word, but nothing could make her more confidential. Once across they went to City Hall Park, where they separated. The unknown went first, moving toward Broadway.

"Quite a woman, she is," remarked the Keener.

"I wish we knew more of her."

"We'll hev ter call her the Vailed Woman, fer she wore a veil when I first see her."

He explained how he had met her near Berthrong's boarding-house, and they spent some time in wondering how she had happened to claim the name of Meg Mason. That it was only a sudden thought was shown by the fact that she now declared she had no right to it.

"She knows Meg, of course," added Fred, "an' she knows Percy Berthrong. Well, I should say she does; she give him a character, that night, that would hev made him blink if he had heard the settin'-out."

"The man's life has been one of utter crime, and he has lived by wronging other people out of money. It is our lot to meet several of his victims. How many more there are, Providence only knows. It is not likely that Berthrong could count them."

"Well, mum, I'll hev ter let you go home alone, I guess, fer I hev a bit o' biz ter transact down this way, an', the hour fer operations is at hand. S'pose you'll excuse me?"

"Certainly, if you wish. Call on me to-morrow."

Mrs. Redburn went her way, and the Keener started for South street. By a lamp he paused and re-read the note which was taking him on the trip:

"Sir:—Am always at home after 11:00 P.M., but never before. No. — South street. Come any evening." J. P. JONES."

"To C. E. JORDAN, Esq."

"All right, J. P. Jones," Fred commented. "I ain't C. E. Jordan, Esquire, but I'll act fer him. I want ter know who you be, an' w'at you know about Jordan."

Resuming his way, he finally reached the place indicated. It was an old, weather-beaten house, but it looked as well as most of its neighbors. No light was visible, and he began to have doubts of his ability to see any one that night,

but the fact that he was a few minutes ahead of time caused him to stand by the door and wait.

A few moments passed, and then a man came along the street with slow and heavy steps. He was a big, muscular man, and might have passed for a stevedore, as far as appearances went.

He paused by the house and began to fit a key to the lock.

"Mister," spoke the Keener, "d'y'e know anybody of the name of Jones?"

"I know myself."

"Be you J. P. Jones?"

"That's me—John Philomaleiot Jones."

"Then you're the gent I want ter orate to, ef you'll allow me ter walk inter yer parlor."

"Come on!"

J. P. Jones answered carelessly, and the Keener followed him into the house. The leader went up one flight, entered a room, lighted the gas and told Fred to sit down. The room was large, but poorly furnished. Jones brought a bottle of beer out of a cupboard, drank a part of it, and then directed:

"Fire ahead, youngster!"

"Mr. Jones, do you know a man named Jordan?"

"Jordan! Jordan! The name seems a bit familiar. Who is he?"

"That's what I want ter know. I hev a note which you wrote ter him. Et invited him ter call here any night after eleven o'clock."

"You ain't Jordan?"

"Of course not; ef I wuz I should know who Jordan is, wouldn't I? I've come fer information, ye see. I'd give you some, but I'm all in the dark."

During this conversation Jones had been busy with his beer and a light lunch he had set out, and the Keener was not able to decide whether his questions really had made any impression on his companion. The latter seemed innocent, and had evinced no surprise.

"How'd you know anything about Jordan?" he asked, through a mouthful of bread.

"I've got an uncle o' that name," Foxy Fred explained, glibly. "We ain't leered from him in ten years, an' we thought, when I found the note, m'be he was back ter New York. Christopher Eli Jordon, is his name."

"Let me see the note."

"I left it ter home."

"Grimmon!"

J. P. Jones answered shortly, and banged his beer-bottle down on the table viciously.

Then he added:

"You're giving me a pure fakel! What's up, anyhow? No more lies, boy. Speak the truth, for I'm dead onto you, and it'll go bard with you if you can't prove yerself straight!"

CHAPTER XV.

CREEPING ON THE PREY.

THE Keener assumed an innocent air.

"Say, boss, you're all wrong," he began, but again J. P. Jones banged the table with the beer-bottle.

"You're a spy!" he declared.

"Come off!"

"You can't fool me! You may have an uncle, or a hundred uncles, but when you say you came here on any such errand as you claim, you lie! Well, to be frank, I know who C. E. Jordan is. So do you. What do you want?"

Boiling his words down thus, Jones leaned forward over the table and looked Fred full in the eyes. He was not an evil-looking man. His face would have been pronounced good by many. He was evidently poor, and a laborer, but did not appear like one who would be so downcast by poverty as to become dishonest. The Keener saw he had got to trust him or not get any information.

"Mr. Jones, are you a square man?" he asked.

"Try me and see."

"That's w'ot I'm goin' ter do. I ain't got any story ter tell, but ef you want ter stand shoulder ter shoulder with right an' justice, now's yer time."

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody; I came myself."

"You can't make anybody believe that, fer it goes contrary to common sense. You cams here as a spy."

"What is there here ter spy on?"

"It has been suspected from the start that there was a motive for not putting Jordan's assault in the newspapers, and that the police were working on the sly. I know it, now. You are here as a sneak, but you'll find it harder to get out than to get in!"

The expression on the speaker's face had changed, and he now looked threatening and vicious.

"You're 'way off!" the Keener declared. "I'm not a spy fer the police, nor nobody else, an' I came here on my own hook. Nobody sent me."

"Those who are the most interested shall sit on your case. You'll stay right here until I send for them."

"Who are they?"

"Fool! Do you think I would tell?"

Fred made an earnest effort to convince his companion, at the same time avoiding all show of fear or uneasiness, but Jones was firm. He sat down and wrote a note, and then rapped on the ceiling until he brought down a rumpled-haired, sleepy-looking man. To him he gave the note, bidding him make all possible haste, and the messenger disappeared.

During this period of time Foxy Fred was tempted to make a dash for liberty, but Jones watched narrowly, and the Keener saw no hope of being able to pass such a muscular person.

The situation appeared serious. Who had been sent for Fred did not know, but, after hearing Jones's own words, he felt that the evidence was altogether too strong, that Jones was a tool for Percy Berthrong, and that the arch-plotter was the one wanted to sit in judgment on him.

Not a pleasant outlook, certainly.

Jones resumed his seat, and the waiting began.

"You needn't be looking for a hole to dodge out of, for you can't do it," the captor declared, noticing the drift of the Keener's ideas.

The latter renewed his efforts to persuade Jones, but met with utter failure, and there he was obliged to sit in hopeless inactivity. It was a long delay which followed, but Fred would gladly have heard that the messenger must go as far as Chicago for those he was after.

At the prisoner feigned sleep. He rested on his elbows on the table and his head on his hands, and in this position relapsed into silence.

Jones had smoked as long as he could with comfort, and he now found the delay tiresome. He yawned, tried various positions, and undoubtedly felt a good deal more like sleeping than Fred did, but his eyes remained open and his manner so alert that it promised nothing.

Foxy Fred did not fail to keep close watch of everything, and, finally, he became aware that the door was slightly ajar. As this might have been due to a defective catch he would have given it no especial attention, but, while he looked, something else caught his notice.

A human face appeared in the opening.

Even this might not indicate anything in particular, for the house doubtless had other occupants, but as the lapse of a few seconds showed that some one was reconnoitering secretly, he became more interested.

Who was there?

A trifle wider grew the opening, and the face became more distinct. A jaunty cap surmounted the head, and the cap looked strangely familiar. So did the face, now. The Keener's blood began to flow more quickly.

The prowler was Chester Lynn!

Rarely had Fred been more surprised. His ally seemed to have a faculty for appearing when most wanted, but that he should be there was almost too agreeable to be true. But what did it portend to him? A friend was near, but he was young. What would he do? What could he do against burly J. P. Jones?

Softly Ches pushed the door further back. Luck was strikingly with him that no sound betrayed the act. Then the prowler stepped fully into the room.

In his hand he held a blanket, and his gaze was fixed intently upon Jones.

The latter remained motionless, almost dozing. His mind was evidently on other subjects, and wondering as one's mind will at the verge of the land of sleep. He had no reason to expect trouble, and he did not once look around. The Keener looked through his fingers, and his eyes were very bright. One great question was in his mind.

How much longer would Jones remain unconscious of things behind his shock head?

Ches Lynn's plan now became apparent. He had carried the blanket unfolded, but he spread it out more and balanced it on both hands. Holding it well forward he crept upon Jones like a cat.

Nearer, nearer he came; so near he could have reached out and touched the captor.

Foxy Fred poised himself for action.

Suddenly Ches moved. Throwing his hands forward he cast the blanket over Jones's head, and then wrapped both his arms around the

blindfolded man's neck. His voice sounded breathlessly.

"Run, Fred; run!"

The Keener had leaped to his feet. He saw Jones struggling in the snare, and it was no mean one. The blanket was of the kind called "double," and, when he tried to throw it off, the long, loose ends were in his way and impeded the free use of his hands. Indeed, he seemed to get more and more tangled up in it, and Ches held fast.

"Run!" he repeated. "Get the key out of the door and be ready to lock it on the other side!"

The plan was clear and distinct, and Fred did not fail to act upon it. He hurried across the floor and made ready to do his share, and then called to Ches. The latter released his hold and dashed toward the door. Jones had just forced one arm out of the blanket when his insnarer passed the threshold.

The Keener flung the door to and turned the key.

"Hoop-la!" he ejaculated. "We've got him fast as a mouse in a trap."

"Away!" Ches replied. "Every moment is of the most vital importance; somebody else may show up to block our game, and we can't compete with those burly men."

"All right, my hearty. Here we go!"

Greatly exhilarated, the Keener followed Ches to the top of the stairs, but, just as they reached that point, the street-door opened and two men entered. Ches gasped, rather than spoke, the note of alarm:

"Percy Berthrong!"

Sure enough! The arch-plotter was there, and in their path of retreat.

CHAPTER XVI.

HELD UP!

THERE was no over-estimating the importance of the calamity which had occurred. A few seconds more and the boys would have been on the street, where their chances would have been of the best, but reach there now they could not.

The most resolute dash for liberty would not take them past Berthrong and his companion.

As they paused in dismay they heard Jones rattle the door behind them. They would soon have the whole gang after them. The men below began to ascend. Thus far they had not seen the boys, but as Jones thumped loudly on the door, discovery came.

Berthrong looked up.

"Is that the kid?" he asked.

The light was dim in the hall, and he evidently did not recognize Foxy Fred, but the latter had no intention of remaining to meet him.

"Up the other stairs!" the Keener whispered to Ches, and they turned and dashed up in haste.

They hoped to find some way of escape there, but brief search showed that they were then on the upper floor, and they could see no way of reaching the roof. If any such place was there, the light was not bright enough to show it.

Jones evidently was determined not to remain locked in, and the door was suddenly shivered by a tremendous blow from the table, used as a battering-ram. Then his head appeared at the opening. He saw Berthrong, and exclaimed:

"The kid has got away!"

"No; he's on the floor above."

"Hal! Then, by the fiends! we've got him. He can't get out, unless he jumps from the window, and that's sure death. Up and at him!"

The speaker worked his way through the battered door, and the boys then had three men against them.

"Ches," remarked the Keener, "I hate ter confess it, but I do believe our name is Mud. We might go into one o' these rooms an' lock the door, but w'ot good would it do us?"

Young Lynn did not reply, and at that moment Jones started up the stairs, two steps at a time. He was smarting from his recent rough experience, and bound to have prompt revenge. Fred had a vague, wild idea of trying to fling him down the stairs, but what actually occurred was a surprise to all.

Ches thrust his hand forward over the rail and spoke one word:

"Stop!"

Jones stopped.

He was looking into the muzzle of a revolver.

"Try to advance one step further and you are a dead man!" Lynn added, in an unfaltering voice.

Jones preferred to retreat a step, and then, awed into silence, he gazed at the weapon which could wipe him off from the face of the earth by one touch of its owner's finger. The revolver

did not waver. The youth's nerves seemed to be of steel, and Jones felt that he would invite his own fate by advancing. As Ches did not begin hostilities, the crook rallied somewhat.

"Put down that gun!" he ordered. "You wouldn't be so mad as to fire, anyhow."

"I tell you in all truth that if you try to come near us I will shoot you!" was the steady reply.

"Do you know what your fate would be if you did?"

"I know what it would be if I did not."

"Why, you little hop-o'-my-thumb! do you really mean to try and bluff us?"

"There's no bluff about it; what I say and mean is, if you try to attack us I will shoot you!"

"Three-an'-a-tiger fer my pard!" cried the Keener, dancing in high glee.

Ches had before shown nerve, but there was something about him now—an utter absence of fear, and the presence of steady resolution—which surprised Fred as much as anybody else.

Berthrong and the other man were close behind Jones, and the leader now found his voice:

"As I expected; it's that kid who has done us up so handsomely before. I mean the one who spoke last, but the little demon with the revolver seems as bad as the other. Hang it! can't we get at them?"

"You can try."

"But I don't hanker for lead."

"Nor I."

"Isn't there any other way to get at them?"

"No."

The trio stood and gazed in silence. Each one felt that if he had his hands on the boys he could crush both at once, figuratively speaking, but that made the matter all the worse. It was hard to be "held up" by such striplings. Ches, however, held the fort. If he had felt any doubts at the start, his courage must have increased, for no one could deny that he had them helpless.

The only troublesome feature was that he and Fred were equally helpless—they could not leave the house.

Berthrong and the third man retreated somewhat and consulted, but all of his wisdom was not sufficient to show the way out of the dilemma. A revolver makes the weak equal to the helpless, and as for a second revolver, in this case, they did not care to risk any shooting by trying to hit Ches before he could hit them.

Presently they called Jones down, and the three whispered for some time. After this, the third man went down the lower flight of stairs and out of the house.

"Mischief afoot!" quoth the Keener.

"What is it?" Ches returned.

"I only wish I knew. Them pirates hev got some wrinkle in their heads, an' I'm afeerd we'll see the result of it later on."

He glanced up at the roof.

"They said there was no way fer us ter git out," he added, "but it may hev been a bluff. Et wouldn't surprise me ter see them come sailin' in like carrion crows after juicy white lambs."

"If there's an opening, we must be the ones to take advantage of it."

"Jest my notion, an' ef you'll keep guard, I'll investigate. Must be some matches in one of the rooms, an' I'll light up the old ark as if fer a weddin'. Mebbe I kin spot a copper on the beat, too."

It was the work of only a short time to make the lights, but they did not show any way of escape. There was no opening to the roof, and no fire-escape, though the windows, front and rear, had small iron balconies. The Keener had a vague idea that, if there was any way to keep the enemy at bay and secure due time, they could drop from one of these balconies to another, but it was not likely that Berthrong and his men would stand idle while any such plan was being put into effect.

No policeman was to be seen.

Ches suddenly called to his ally:

"Fred, some one is on the roof!"

"How d'ye know?"

"I heard them there. Listen!"

The Keener obeyed. There was a creaking sound over their heads, as if the dilapidated roof was springing under the footsteps of one or more persons.

"By crickey! they are up there!" Foxy Fred agreed.

"What's their plan?"

"That's just it—w'ot is it? I can't find no hole in the roof, present or past; an' they can't fly in at the winder like birds, ef they be crows. Hold up, Ches; hold up! Kin et be they're goin' ter git at us by means o' the balconies? They kin git a rope an' lower theirselves, an' then they'll hev us foul. By crickey! that's a corker!"

Great anxiety was pictured on the boys' faces, and Ches suddenly extended one hand.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

The Keener obeyed. A man was standing on the rear balcony, peering in at the window!

CHAPTER XVII.

FIGHTING THEIR WAY.

FOXY FRED was startled. The danger was even closer than he had anticipated, and it was no small matter to be between two fires. He recognized Berthrong's unknown ally in the man on the balcony, and clearly saw that only bold action would save them.

Already the man's hand was on the sash as he proceeded to raise it.

While moving around Fred had found a dilapidated broom, and the handle thereof he had stripped clean. He had felt a vague impression that he might have use for this, and the use had come quickly,

He ran to the window, and the fellow on the balcony saw the broomstick swung up as a club. He had moved the sash enough to make a small opening, and through this the Keener sent the warning:

"Ef you try ter come in, I'll knock you off the balcony!"

The man stood like a statue. If the boy was in danger, so was he. The house was old and the balcony none too strong. It was very small, too, and he had to balance himself carefully. Even more vividly than the Keener he realized that a very slight thing would send him headlong to the stone flagging of the back yard, and that meant death.

He stood and stared at Fred in silence.

"You ain't wanted here," added the latter, with an increase of courage. "You kin go back where you come from, and you can't go too quick. Hustle!"

"Say, you wouldn't hit me?"

"I will, sure, ef you try ter come in."

"Now, see here; you're young, an' you don't want ter do no desperit deed—"

"Gammon! I guess I've a right ter protect my own life, an' I mean ter do it. Ef you persist in tryin' ter do me up you must take the consequences. Now, you keep back, or there'll be the worst kind of a racket."

The man glared his wrath, but he was unable to do more. It was hard to be brought to bay by one so young and small, but he could not be oblivious to the quiet determination in Fred's voice. Little as he valued the latter's life and liberty, his own welfare was of great importance to him. He did not dare to take any risks.

There was a lull, during which both did some thinking. Then the Keener spoke again:

"Hustle back where you came from!"

His enemy looked up. He had fastened a rope to the chimney and slid down, but it was not so easy to go up, short as the distance was. Fred made a threatening motion with the club, and the fellow grasped the rope. He could not see any use of remaining on the balcony, exposed to the constant danger of a fall, and he was willing to retreat.

He began raising himself, and, after a brief struggle regained his former position.

One more danger was overcome, but the defenders knew not in what way the next attack would come. The last attempt, however, had given the Keener an idea, and the more he thought of it, the more he was determined to make a bold effort.

"Ches," he spoke, "why can't we work the rope racket, too?"

"Where is the rope?"

"In a bed, in there. The bed is one of the old-fashioned sort, made before springs, an' the mattress lies on a cord which is stretched from piece ter piece o' the frame. I found that out when I was haulin' the broom from under the bed, where I harpended ter see it. Now, why can't I git that rope, an' we go down the front balconies ter the street?"

"Get it, quick!"

Fred needed no more encouragement, and he hastened away. Whether they would be able to make good their retreat was a question, but there was nothing like trying. If they remained where they were they must sooner or later fall victims to some scheme on the part of the enemy.

He secured the rope as soon as possible, but as he re-entered the hall, Ches gave the warning:

"All three men are again down below, and they seem to be maturing some plan."

"Ef they'll give us a bit o' time we will let them plan an' be hanged. Stand firm, comrade!"

The Keener raised the front window and attached the rope firmly to the upper balcony. It

looked like an easy task to slide down, checking speed at the intervening balcony, and he returned to Ches in high spirits.

"You go first, an' keep yer wits well about yer. Don't try ter be too fast, but slide slow and sure; you can't fail ef you want ter. I'll stan' guard an' give you time ter go down, but don't be too slow. When I get under way I shall be a ragin' cyclone, an' go down like a shot. They may see I'm gone the minute I disappear, an' they could make it hot fer me. See?"

"Yes."

Ches did not answer with his usual coolness, and when he turned the revolver over to his friend and turned away, his expression was unusually serious.

"He don't like the idee of slidin' down, an' I don't know ez I blame him," the Keener thought.

Ches was soon out of the window, and that was the last his ally could see of him. It was an anxious moment for the guard. The men below hardly ever looked up, seeming to feel that there was no escape for the boys, but this confidence on their part gave Fred some doubt of its being sincere. They did not appear to notice, either, that Fred had taken Chester's place.

The Keener tried to measure time with judgment, and, when he thought Ches had reached the sidewalk, he thrust the revolver into his pocket and ran lightly to the window.

He looked down. Ches had come to a stop on the lower balcony, and seemed afraid to go further. His ally grasped the rope and went down like a gymnast. Disdaining the aid of anything by the way he was soon by young Lynn's side.

"The door is open!" then whispered the latter.

"So much the more need of haste. Take the last slide!"

The order was promptly obeyed, but the agile Keener did not wait to see his predecessor on the sidewalk. He followed sharply, and dropped almost as soon as Chester. Neither dropped any too soon.

As they recovered their balance they looked toward the door, and there stood Percy Berthrong. A more amazed man than the sport it would have been hard to find. He stared at them as if he saw a ghost.

"Malediction! here they are!" he finally gasped.

"Hustle!" Foxy Fred ordered.

No further word was needed, and the allies dashed up the street at full speed. Every second counted, and they did not venture to look around, but in a short time the sound of footsteps showed that they were pursued.

"We shall be caught!" breathed, rather than spoke, Chester.

"Not for Hannah! We're all bunk. How long d'ye s'pose they kin chase us in the streets of New York? A copper will soon take a hand in the game, an' then their name will be Mud. Git a wiggle on, pard!"

They sped around a corner, and saw a patrolman near the end of the block. He was going slowly, with his back toward them, and had not thus far seen or heard them.

Berthrong was not far behind, but when he reached the corner, he, too, saw the patrolman. The sight brought him to a stop. He dared not invite a contest with a blue-coat for a judge, and the pursuit ended there.

Foxy Fred playfully punched Ches in the ribs.

"We're still in it, old chap! Moderate yer speed, fer we ain't in an atom o' danger now. Say, but ain't we had a pile o' fun?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PROWLERS OF THE STREET.

MEETING with no further adventures, Fred and Chester continued on together until the latter's home was reached. There they separated, and the Keener went away alone. He was near where Dan Gray lived, and, late as it was, he walked around to the house to see if there was any sign of that young man.

His room was dark, and nothing was to be seen.

Resuming his way, Fred turned his face toward home, but he was not destined to reach there without an experience of interest. His course was past the residence of Mrs. Redburn, and when he neared the house he naturally glanced that way. He saw that a light was burning there, though the lowered shades prevented any view of the interior.

Another thing he noticed. Two men were lurking on the opposite side of the street, and he became alert at once, when he recognized Chub Mason and Eph. He stepped into a doorway, and remained silent, but watchful.

Chub and Eph conferred, and the former consulted his watch. Then both walked toward the Keener, who, having no chance to get out of the way, pressed as far back as possible. The crooks were talking too busily to look his way.

"Berthrong will be in a rage ef we don't nab her to-night," remarked Eph.

"Never fear; we'll have her before three o'clock, but it would be madness ter go in now. The light shows she ain't gone ter bed, an' we've got ter take her by surprise, sure. She'll be asleep in a little while, though, an' then we'll go in—"

Foxy Fred beard no more, for they had recede'd too far, but there had been enough to arouse all of his interest. Plainly, their words referred to Mrs. Redburn, and it was their intention to abduct her.

"Guess they've got on ter the fack that I'm under her pay," soliloquized the Keener, "but ez she ain't dangerous herself, I don't see why they should take the trouble ter gobble her. Why should Berthrong want ter be burdened with her, anyhow? I can't see the—"

He stopped, meditated on another point, and then whistled softly.

"Say, ain't I been a clam?" he exclaimed. "Or be I a clam, now? I'll find out!"

He did not know what means the crooks had, if any, for entering the house, but it certainly would not do to leave Mrs. Redburn in ignorance of her danger. He crossed the street and rung the door-bell. He had to repeat the ring before a servant appeared. He explained his business, whereupon the servant tried to drive him away by declaring that the hour was too late, and Mrs. Redburn was in bed; but when told of the light in her room, and soothed by the magic power of a small coin, the woman condescended to go up herself, and see if the lady was to be seen.

She soon returned.

"It's all right," she said.

"I knew it would be."

He went out lightly, and Mrs. Redburn met him at the door of her room.

"Surprised ter see me, ain't yer?" he inquired.

"I confess that I am."

"The hour is an atom late fer a fashionable call, but nabobs like me don't go much on style. Mum, important business has brought me here. You're in danger; you be."

"In danger?"

"Yes. Two gallus crooks, Chub Mason an' Eph by name, an' sinners by reputation, be planned ter kidnap ye, without your consent."

Mrs. Redburn changed color.

"How do you know this?"

The Keener plainly told of his experience in the street, and she could doubt no longer.

"It seems nothing is too infamous for them!" she exclaimed.

"Right! Correct! Sure! But kin you tell me why they want you?"

"They probably think I'm against them."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"No; I don't think it is. I've got an idee in my mind, an' it won't do no harm to mention it, I reckon. All this cyclone means something. Mum, be you sure you ain't Maze, the wife of Perce Berthrong?"

Mrs. Redburn dropped into a chair. She covered her face with her hands, and remained silent for at least a minute. Fred felt that she was in deep sorrow, and he left it with her to speak first. Finally she uncovered her face. Her emotion was gone, and she made answer quite calmly:

"I need not hesitate to speak freely to such a friend as you. I am the unfortunate woman who married Percy Berthrong."

"Then it is clear why Chub an' Eph are after you, b'jinks!"

"Yes."

"But how do they expect ter get in?"

"One of the servants was discharged and sent away this evening. She was a sullen, insubordinate girl, and her honesty was doubted. Being questioned, this afternoon, as to a missing key she ought to have had, she said she had lost it. This was not regarded as important then, I think, but it is easy, now, to surmise that she was bribed to give it to the men."

"Clear as a whistle. Well, we ain't goin' ter let them come in, be we?"

"I will call the landlady, at once, and see what can be done."

Mrs. Redburn left the room, and the landlady, on being aroused, was not at loss for an expedient. The front door was equipped with a heavy bolt, and though this was not used, it could be brought into play now to advantage.

It was duly moved, and then the light was extinguished in Mrs. Redburn's room and the three sat down to await the result.

Somewhat more than half an hour later Chub and Eph were seen approaching the house. They assumed a bold and careless air, and walked up the stoop as if they belonged there. Chub fitted a key to the door and turned it. Then he pushed, but the door did not open. He repeated the experiment several times, but always with no better success, and then the fact dawned upon them that they were baffled.

Their angry mutterings were even heard above but they were too wise to linger long.

They went down the street with a manner changed and subdued.

The landlady retired to rest, but, before she went, due arrangements had been made for Fred to have a room there during the rest of the night. He did not retire at once, however; Mrs. Redburn informed him that she wished to speak further with him.

"You have learned who I am," she began; "a fact which, perhaps, I ought to have revealed before, but I shrank from the confession. My maiden name was Mary Stannard. I met Percy Berthrong and was dazzled by what I considered his fine appearance.

"My parents saw clearer than I and warned me against him, but as they had no proof of their suspicions, I would not bear to their wise counsel.

"I am ashamed to say I finally eloped with him. We were both young, then, and I clung to him with blind devotion through several years. Little by little I learned that he had many faults; little by little I began to suspect that I did not know all.

"For a long time, in my infatuation, I would not see to what all signs pointed. Finally he began to abuse me. Even then I clung to him. But when his old fancy for me turned to hate, he was less careful of letting me see him as he was, and I learned of two or three lawless and cruel deeds he had done, simply to get money.

"Finally, my life became almost unbearable. Often he struck me, and I was subjected to every indignity.

"A short time ago I learned, in advance, of one of his plots. He had wronged a lady, bere, out of all her money; not much, but of vast importance to her. She had a son, too, whom he had led into evil ways.

"Her husband had gone West to try and get a business chance after a failure somewhere in the East. He left her here, well provided for, as he thought, and hoping soon to see her, but his ill luck had continued.

"When she wrote him of Percy Berthrong's work he thought there was a chance to punish the swindler, and asked her to send on all the papers, and proof, for him to look over.

"She did so, and he wrote he would arrive in New York on a certain evening.

"Can you guess the rest? I heard Percy, Chub 'and Eph plan to meet the returning husband, sandbag him, rob him of the papers, and thus deprive him of all proof. I tried to prevent the deed, and barely failed. You can surmise whom they plotted to sandbag. It was he known to us as C. E. Jordan!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A BLOW THAT WENT HOME.

"WELL, by crickey!"

Foxy Fred looked at his companion in wonder.

"So you all along knew more about C. E. Jordan than you let on?" he added.

"Yes, and no. I knew of their plan to rob him of the papers, but I never had heard his name. I do not now know whether it really is Jordan or not, but I am sure the man at Doctor McNabb's is the same person who came on from somewhere to bring justice to the men who had wronged his wife out of her money.

"It seems that her own son was the one who betrayed the news of his coming to Berthrong—not in enmity to his father, but weakly.

"Fred, an awful load was on my mind, that night, when I stood above Jordan, with you. Though I did not see it done I was sure it was the work of my husband and his men. My mind was in a whirl. I tried to keep calm, but it was hard.

"I had a great struggle before I could break away from Percy Berthrong, but it is done, and I feel happier, now.

"One other of his schemes I have foiled. My departure from him was also hastened by the fact that I had learned he was about to commit bigamy by marrying again, and that the victim was to be Zadah, daughter of Dugald Forryster.

"This scheme I foiled by sending a messenger-boy with a copy of my marriage-certificate, which was handed to the bride at the very hour of the ceremony. It would have been sent sooner if it had been best, in my judgment, but in all pity for her, as well as for myself, I wanted to make the stroke as telling as possible."

The story was told, and Mrs. Redburn ceased to speak. Foxy Fred looked at her wonderingly.

"By crickey! you're a clipper!" he declared.

"I'm a woman driven to desperation!"

"What d'ye mean ter do now?"

"As for myself, keep away from the infamous man I was so unlucky as to marry. The name Maze, by which he called me, is loathsome now, because he invented it. I think I shall continue as plain Mrs. Redburn. Very soon I hope to leave New York, but, before I go, I should be glad to see Mr. Jordan recover both his health and his wife."

"Where is the wife?"

"I haven't the least idea!"

"We must find her, b'jinks!"

There was not much more to say, and the Keener went to bed with his last expressed idea still in his mind. He had breakfast in the house, and then prepared to leave.

"I'll hunt up my right bower, Ches Lynn, an' then we'll go on the trail," he explained, to Mrs. Redburn. "Say, though, I must bring Ches 'round ter see you, mum."

"Is he a worthy boy?"

"Worthy! Well, I should smile! He's a reg'lar corker, Ches is. He's little, but he's a hurricane. Why, he kin take a boy twice his size an' lick him with one hand; at least, I know he can, though I never see him do it. He's white, too; no funny biz about Ches."

"I shall be glad to see him, if he is willing to call."

"He will be, sure. You an' he will take ter each other like ducks ter water."

With this confident assertion, the Keener went out. Naturally, the late revelations had brought C. E. Jordan vividly back to his mind, and he went to Doctor McNabb's first of all.

"No better," the physician reported, shaking his head. "He won't be, until his fever turns. If he pulls through that he will be all right, I think, for I can see no serious injury to him; but a fever is bad. I may say it's mighty bad—though I seldom swear. Bad habit!—bad habit!"

McNabb was eccentric, but Fred had come to regard him as a capable physician, and felt sure that Jordan was in safe hands.

Getting ready to leave, the Keener went to the door. The first person he saw was a very drunk young man. This person had several boys keeping company with him, but not in friendship. They were joking him roughly, and now and then giving him a sly punch which he was not in condition to resent. Evidently, he had been annoyed about to the limit of his endurance, for, seeing Fred at the open door, he turned, floundered up the steps, and exclaimed: "Let me in! Let me in, or these fiends will kill me!"

There was a chorus of jeers from the boys, but, unheeding their cries, Fred pulled him in, closed the door, jammed him up against the wall and glared at him fiercely.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" he demanded.

"Ashamed? Wh-wh-why should I—hic—be ashamed?"

"Because you promised me not ter drink no more, you clam!"

"Promish you? Who b' you? Never seen fore."

"That's a lie, Dan Gray! I've seen you before this day, though I never see you sober. Pretty citizen, you be; ain't you? By crickey! afore I'd make a slop-bowl o' my stomach I'd go an' sell myself fer a yeller dog."

Dan Gray, for it was he, looked ashamed and distressed.

"I'm a brute!" he admitted, mournfully.

"Fact, b'mighty!"

"And a fool!"

"You never spoke truer."

"But you don't know the despair I am in. If you had betrayed your best friends, you would feel as I do. What can excuse perfidy like mine? Nothing, nothing!"

"You can't excuse it by pourin' a gallon o' whisky inter yer stomach. Dan'l, you're a bad egg, I do believe, but you're more weak than sinful. You set down in that chair until I see w'ot kin be done fer you. Down you go, old chap!"

The Keener pushed Dan into a chair without

ceremony, and then, as the latter submitted weakly, went up-stairs to find Doctor McNabb. Fred felt a good deal of pity, as well as disgust, for Dan, for he was positive that the young man was really too good-hearted to go to ruin at the gait he was using; and, having heard that there were remedies for drunkenness, he wanted to see McNabb and ask if he could not help his acquaintance to firmer footing.

Dan, left alone, stared around stupidly for awhile. Then he arose and walked along the hall.

He had already forgotten where he was, but the idea was in his befuddled brain that the hall was not the place for him, and he was seeking something else—he knew not what.

He reached the door of the back parlor and opened it. He entered.

In this room Jordan lay ill. The doctor's servant was acting as nurse, but not with vigilance. The servant slept near the foot of the bed, out of the range of Dan's vision, and remained unconscious of the intrusion.

Dan saw the bed, for it was directly in front of him. It looked like a haven of rest; it lured him on. He advanced until within a few steps of it—then he saw Jordan for the first time.

The victim of the slung-shot was in a species of sleep. His eyes were closed. His face was flushed with fever, and contracted as if in pain. He muttered uneasily and unintelligibly.

Dan Gray stopped short. His gaze was fixed upon the fevered face. Something made that sight startling to him. His eyes dilated, and his expression was one of terror. If he had known the hour of his own death was at hand, in sudden and violent form, he would not have been more deeply moved.

Jordan's mutterings grew distinct.

"On to New York!" he exclaimed.

Dan Gray gasped for breath.

"She must be saved!" the unconscious man added. "Poor wife!—far away in sickness and want, robbed by human vampires. She shall be saved! On to New York!"

Dan Gray clutched at his throat as if he were suffocating.

"Where is our son who should save you?" Jordan went on. "What was he doing when all our hard-earned money slipped away? What is he doing now, when you are suffering? Oh! my wife, my wife! what is the full meaning of your words when you say, 'My heart is breaking?' Where is Edmund, in your hour of need?"

Dan Gray uttered a hoarse cry. He turned and fled from the room as if pursued by deadly enemies, and his appearance was that of one gone mad. He reached the hall and there fell prostrate, writhing, tearing his garments in tatters at the neck, and rolling his eyes in frenzy.

Then from his lips came a hoarse and anguished cry:

"My father, oh! my poor father! Merciful Heaven, was there ever such a wretch as I?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE VAILED WOMAN SPEAKS.

Two persons stood over Dan as he made these excited comments. They were Doctor McNabb and Foxy Fred, who had chanced to arrive on the spot just in time to see the last of the scene in the sick-room.

Dan quickly ceased to struggle, but lay moaning, and they looked at each other significantly.

"By crickey! I b'lieve this is a diskivery," finally observed the Keener.

"Whom does he mean by his 'father'?"

"Why, Jordan, sure! I rutber wonder I didn't get a suspicion before, fer I've heerd in the last few hours that Jordan did hev a profligate son. Dan wandered in there without a thought, an' it just knocked him razzled when he recognized his own dad. That's the way I figger it."

"Lift him up, and let us carry him to the hall room."

This was done. Dan did not move, but when McNabb poured a powerful potion down his throat, he opened his eyes.

"I am the basest wretch living," he declared.

"You ought ter know," returned Fred, dryly. "So that man is your father?"

"Yes."

"W'ot's his name?"

"Cyrus E. Jordan."

"How does it happen yourn is Dan Gray?"

"It is not; my name is Edmund Jordan. I gave the name of Dan Gray to you because I feared the police. I wish, now, I had gone to them; I wish they had hung me by the neck as such a wretch deserves to be hung!"

The recent shock had sobered the speaker, and he spoke like one in his right mind. Not in maudlin grief, but in deepest remorse did he express his feelings.

"W'ot have you done, anyhow?" Fred demanded.

"I have kept company with Percy Berthrong and other fast men, worshiping them because they made a fine show, and gone to ruin in my efforts to rival them. My poor mother had a little money, and when I was drunk I was persuaded by Berthrong to tell him an easy way to get this money. He made me believe we would have a great 'celebration,' as he called it, with the money, but when he got his hands on it he kept all. Practically, I have robbed my own mother. May she forgive me; heaven never will!"

"Where is she, now?"

"Where, indeed? I don't know. Heart-broken, she may have sought oblivion in the river."

"An' this man is your father?"

"Yes."

"Also, you stole money from Dugald Ferryst'er?"

"Yes."

"No wonder you groan, Dan'; no wonder at all. Ef you wuz as bad as you seem I'd throw ye over right quick, but I see you're a mighty foolish feller who has been dazzled by evil men an' led on ter ruin. That's always the way when a young feller sets out ter trot ag'inst time. Bad fix you're in, but I do wish you could be helped out."

"It is impossible. Leave me to my ruin, or, better yet, hand me over to the police. It will help me to keep the vow I now make—never again to touch a drop of liquor as a beverage."

"Your reform is a trifle late, but ef you hold ter your grip, you may be a winner yet. Doc, I'd like ter see you outside."

They went to the hall, and duly conferred. McNabb said that young Jordan would soon be all right, and as the elder man of the name was already there, he agreed to let Edmund remain. It was hoped he could be kept from his besetting sin, and made to care for his father.

These matters had just been arranged when the door-bell rung. The Keener answered it, and found Ches Lynn there.

"Fred," cried that person, eagerly, "I want you to go with me. I believe there is a discovery in store for us, but I want you to take the lead."

"I'm your tomato. Good-by, Doc; I'll see you later. W'ot's up, Ches?"

The last question was asked after they reached the street.

"You remember the Vailed Woman, as you call her—the one you saved from suicide on the East River Bridge?"

"Sure!"

"She is down in Washington Square, and Meg Mason is with her. As near as I can make out, Meg has been beaten by Chub Mason and driven out of the house. She is weak and suffering, and the Vailed Woman is trying to comfort her, but neither has a home to go to. Meg is so feeble she needs help!"

"She ain't goin' round the streets now, snoopin' fer ter find Maze an' git her inter Perce Berthrong's grip, eh?" retorted the Keener, none too amiably.

"Let us forget that, now."

"Nary forget! When she was a woman-hunter she looked so wild-eyed an' glarin'! at she put slivers inter my blood. Still, I ain't a hard cl'ap, an' I do want ter see the Vailed Woman ag'in. Heave ahead, Ches!"

They were already going briskly, and soon arrived at the Square.

"You take the lead, Fred," Ches suggested; "you're older than I am."

The two women were still on the bench, and, as the Keener remarked, they "looked like Grief an' Sorrow a-posin' fer their pieters!" They had relapsed into silence, and, suspecting they did not know what else to do, he walked up to them boldly.

"Hullo, ladies!" he began, genially. "How goes the battle, anyhow?"

They looked at him, but neither answered.

"Out fer an appetizer?" he added, in the same vein.

Then the Vailed Woman spoke quickly:

"You and the lady who was with you on the Bridge expressed a strong wish to aid me. If you were sincere, your time has come."

"What kin I do fer you, mum?"

"Make a home for this unfortunate woman," and she pointed to Meg Mason.

"Hum! I dunno! Is she still a life-hunter?"

"She is a homeless waif."

"All I ask," interrupted Meg, feebly, "is a chance to lie down and die."

"Great guns! mum, don't be huntin' fer sech

a place. Let the past be forgot, an I'll tow yer ter a safe harbor. Guess it'll hev ter be my own home, too."

He paused, looked sharply at the Veiled Woman, and slowly added:

"I reckon you have a name, mum?"

"It is Mrs. Jordan."

Fred nodded sharply.

"Guess I'll take ye in, sure!"

His good-humor had returned; in fact, it seemed to be of the highest order, now; and he gave Meg Mason his arm.

Mrs. Jordan walked on the other side, and Ches brought up the rear, keeping so far back, in fact, that the Keener had no chance to address him.

When the house was reached Meg was put to bed. She bore more than one black-and-blue mark, and Fred suspected that her devotion to Chub Mason was shaken.

The Keener spoke to the other woman:

"Did you ever know a feller named Edmund Jordan?"

She started and gazed at him in silent dismay.

"Or Cypress E. Jordan?"

She burst into tears.

"I see that you know my wretched history," she returned, when she could command her voice.

"Well, I don't see why you hev refused ter give yer name, before this."

"I will explain all, for I feel sure you are one who is to be trusted in safety. My son is in trouble with his employer, and is hiding, somewhere; I know not where. For his sake, to avoid being arrested and compelled to betray him, I went out to lose myself in the great city; to go I cared not where, so long as I was not found by the police. It was because of this I refused to give my name. Once, in my desperation, I almost nerved myself to do harm to Percy Berthrong, to whom all my troubles are due. This was the night I first met you. Again, utterly hopeless, I decided on suicide, but you saved me on the East River Bridge."

"Mum, you've had a hard time, but there's better luck in store."

"Not for me, I fear."

"Don't you want ter see yer husband an' yer son?"

"I know not where they are."

"But I do."

"You?"

"Bet yer bottom dollar! Sling on yer Paris bunnit, ag'in, an' we'll waltz over an' see 'em. First, though, let me go out an' speak ter Ches Lynn, my pard. He's bashful, that boy is; an' dasset venture inter perlite society. I've got a plan fer makin' Berthrong sick, an' I want ter see Ches about it."

CHAPTER XXI.

A WONDERFUL CHANGE.

PERCY BERTHRONG sat in his room, with Chub Mason and Eph for companions. All looked gloomy and angry.

"There's no use of trying any longer," declared the captain of the crooks. "This undercurrent which we cannot fully grasp is too much for us, and our safest way is to skip the town while we can. Chicago holds out its welcoming arms."

"They may be police arms," reminded Chub.

"Well, it can be no worse than here. That boy, Fred, whoever he is, is raising the Old Nick with us. He must bear a charmed life, too. I won't struggle against fate."

"I hate ter be drove away."

"Explain your objections at Police Headquarters, and I doubt not they will let you stay."

"Don't be funny, Perce."

"I don't feel in mood for it. Well, as I said, we will skip. We'll go well heeled. In this package—he removed the object named from his pocket—"is the proceeds of our haul from the Jordans, both what we got from the old woman, and what Edmund handed over to us after he got it from Forryster."

"So you've got it out o' the bank?"

"Just got it. As I said, all that money is here, and there's a thousand dollars besides. The rest I have sent by Express to Chicago. This boodle we will carry right along with us."

"Are you sure?"

The question sounded at the door, and the three crooks turned hurriedly. The door was ajar, and a man stood in the opening, but he now walked in, followed by others. Before the surprised gang could recover their wits Foxy Fred, Dugald Forryster and two other men were in the room.

"It is my opinion," added Forryster, "that

you will not take any of my money to Chigago!"

"By the fiends!" cried Berthrong, hotly, "how dare you—"

"Easy, easy!" spoke the unknown man. "Respect our feelings, and make no disturbance."

He and his companion threw open their coats, and two detective badges were revealed. Perce and his followers were silent with dismay. They were matched in numbers, and the majesty of the LAW was against them.

"Come down out o' the tree, P. Berthrong," advised the Keener; "the gun is aimed at you, an' it's full o' powder an' shot, an' other fixin's."

"You young demon! you are the cause of this!" almost shouted the leader of the crooks.

"I be, a few, mister," Fred nonchalantly agreed.

"Berthrong," sternly continued Forryster, "you can hand over that package of which you have just boasted. My own money I am bound to have back; Mrs. Jordan's I will restore to her; and the extra thousand is for your punishment. All must be given to us."

"I refuse to do it!"

"Then you will be arrested at once."

"Do you think I am to be bluffed?"

"I simply know you will be arrested, if you refuse."

Berthrong stormed, and Chub and Eph joined him, but they found Forryster firm. At last they yielded to the inevitable. The leader reluctantly asked:

"Do you promise us freedom from arrest if we comply with your request? Can we leave town in safety?"

"As far as I am concerned, you can; I only want the money. My daughter is over her fancy for you; wounded pride is, at times, a great restorer. She and I are content. These detectives are in my pay, and will do what I say."

Berthrong hesitated. It was hard, but he had pursued similar tactics with his own victims before then, and had learned that it was the best way to pay tribute rather than go to prison.

Viciously he tossed the package to Forryster.

"Take it, and be hanged!" he snarled.

"Thanks! It is all we want."

Forryster rose to leave, and his companions followed his example, but, as they opened the door, other men walked in. They were headed by Doctor McNabb, while the rest of the party had a look which smacked of the police department. One of them pointed to the leader of the crooks.

"Percy Berthrong," he spoke, "you are my prisoner!"

"Devils! what now?" shouted Perce.

"The charge is that you used a slung-shot on one Cypress E. Jordan, and that Mason and Eph were your accomplices. We have ample proof of all we allege."

"Who accuses us?"

"That you will learn later."

"We are not guilty. We—"

"You can tell all this in court. Now, you go with us!"

Berthrong glared at Forryster.

"You have made a vile conspiracy against us."

"Wrong," Forryster returned. "I was asked to press the first charge against you, and did so willingly, but I knew not of this latter matter. I am not your accuser."

"Then who is?"

"Your accuser is here!"

It was a clear voice from near the rear, and the speaker pressed forward. To most of those there this person was only a slight boy, and some had been told that his name was Chester Lynn, but Berthrong first started, then looked in uncertainty which developed into conviction and anger; then he hissed:

"Maze!"

"Yes," was the ready answer, "I am your unfortunate wife!"

Frederick Walsingham Mather almost fell over a big detective in the surprised start he made. Then, with dilated eyes, he gazed at Ches Lynn—Ches no longer. He was simply astounded. The declaration was backed up by the fact that it was the voice of Mrs. Redburn, rather than that of his "boy" ally, but even then he found it hard to credit the truth. Ches, not a boy but Mrs. Redburn in disguise! Amazing fact!

But the crook's voice broke the spell:

"And it is you who has brought me to this!"

"I have done my share."

"Then you shall reap your reward!"

The infuriated man drew a revolver, mad

with the desire to kill her then and there, but he had to deal with men not easy to take unaware. He was seized by the detectives before he could do any harm. Even then he was not easily subdued, and many a hard and painful blow was given him ere he was subdued and handcuffed.

Chub and Eph wisely remained passive.

When all three were rendered harmless the triumph of justice was complete.

It was not until several minutes later that Foxy Fred worked around to where Mrs. Redburn stood.

"Mum," he remarked, in some confusion, "I'm all broke up. I see you ain't what I thought you was, an' yet you be. I never suspected Ches Lynn was anybody but wot he seemed, an' I want ter know ef you really be him."

"I am the only Ches Lynn," she replied, smiling faintly. "I assumed the disguise in order to work against Percy Berthrong more successfully. When he cast me, his wife, off, I determined to stop his career of crime. I am Mary Stannard Berthrong, Mrs. Redburn and Ches Lynn, all in one."

"It is not strange you did not suspect the fact, for I was carefully made up as 'Ches,' and, also, I changed my voice. My courage has been severely tried in my character as a boy, and never more than when I went down the rope at the South street house. That was something for which I was not fitted. You remember the dog in the Macdougal street house? When Tempest came around the stove, where I was, I was saved because he recognized me."

"You never were in the house where I claimed to have a home as Ches Lynn. I did hire a room there, but rarely occupied it. So much for Chester!"

"By crickey! it's hard on me ter know there ain't no Ches, but I'm proud ter know I've had a woman pard of such nerve. I be, by jinks!"

The work was done. It was found that Berthrong had been severely injured in the fight with the police, and he had a long illness in consequence. Then he was sentenced to prison, where Chub, Eph and Jones had already gone.

When Cyrus Jordan recovered, he and his wife and their son left for the West. There is cause to believe Edmund, alias Dan Gray, had received a lesson he would never forget, and that he would shun evil ways. Their money was fully recovered. Mr. Forryster refused to prosecute Edmund, and the latter and his daughter still reside together.

Dr. McNabb lives and prospers.

Meg Mason only waited to recover her health, and then became a nurse in a hospital, where she is doing much good.

And last of all, Foxy Fred flourishes, and is in good luck. Mrs. Redburn had learned of his many good qualities, and as she was alone in the world, she informally adopted him. Together they have found prosperity and happiness, and he never ceases to exult over the chance which made him acquainted with her and "Ches Lynn."

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